

Horizon Europe Transitional Measures: Call document for SNSF Advanced Grants 2023

Switzerland is currently considered a non-associated third country for participation in Horizon Europe and other related programmes. For mono-beneficiary schemes such as most ERC grants, researchers at Swiss research institutions are not eligible to apply. To remedy this situation, the SNSF has been mandated by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) to offer an alternative call for proposals as part of its broader transitional measures in 2021-2023. The aim is to maintain Switzerland's strong position as a centre of research. International applicants who intended to apply for an ERC Advanced Grant to work in Switzerland and applicants based in Switzerland can submit their proposals to the SNSF. This document describes the rules and procedures for submitting a proposal to the transitional **SNSF Advanced Grants Call 2023**. Key features of the funding instrument are summarised in **Box 1**.

Box 1. Key features of the SNSF Advanced Grants Call 2023

- The scheme is **open to all** research disciplines and topics.
- **Applicants must** have a track record of outstanding research over the past ten years and **must be recognised as leaders in their field**. They want to pursue ground-breaking, high-gain/high-risk research in Switzerland.
- Swiss host institutions must ensure conditions that allow applicants to direct the research and manage their funding.
- The **budget can be up to CHF 1.9 million** for a period of up to **five years**. Additional funding of up to CHF 870'000 may be requested for a) costs in connection with the move to Switzerland; b) the acquisition or use of scientific infrastructure/major equipment; c) other major experimental and field work costs, excluding personnel costs.
- The **scientific quality of the research project** and the applicant are the only evaluation criteria. The proposal is submitted in one step and must include the CV, the major achievements record, the research plan, the resources requested and the host institution confirmation letter.
- All proposals will be sent to international experts for external peer review. Thereafter, all applicants get access to their peer reviews and may respond to them in a rebuttal letter.
- The **evaluation by international panels will be a one-step procedure**. The panel members will rate the proposals based on the full research plan, the CV and major achievements and the external international peer reviews and the rebuttal letter.
- The call will open on **6 November 2023** and closes on **31 January 2024**. Applicants must **pre-register by 15 December 2023** and provide the following information via mySNF (www.mysnf.ch): Summary of the application, host institution, disciplines and keywords.
- The applicants will be informed of the final decisions in **December 2024**. The projects can start, at the earliest, in **January 2025**
- The funding of the projects is expressly subject to the financing decisions of the responsible federal bodies (Federal Council and Parliament).

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1 Eligibility criteria

1.1 Applicant

1.1.1 Track record

Applicants have a track record of outstanding research over the past ten years and are recognised leaders in their field. These benchmarks should be matched by at least one of the following indicators:

- Several significant peer-reviewed publications in a responsible role that had a major impact in the research field(s).
- Major research monographs (for research fields where monographs are the norm).
- A substantial record of invited presentations in well-established international conferences, organization of international conferences, granted patents, outreach activities¹, general contributions to science², other artefacts with documented use³.

Any documented career break during the last ten years should be clearly explained in the CV.

1.1.2 Multiple applications and duplicate funding

- The applicant may submit an application under the call identifier ERC-2023-AdG. However, the applicant is not allowed to participate as principal investigator in any ERC frontier research grant project or SNSF Consolidator Grant or SNSF Starting Grant *and* an SNSF Advanced Grant in parallel. Furthermore:
 - Researchers cannot hold more than 1 ongoing SNSF Advanced Grant at a time.
 - Funding for research projects already being funded by the SNSF or third parties is excluded.
 - Researchers who receive an SNSF Advanced Grant must inform the SNSF about any existing ERC Grants and parallel applications in ERC schemes.
 - Applicants will have to provide information in mySNF on available and requested funding for their research projects (for details, see section 3.1).
- A re-submission of an Advanced Grant proposal that was rejected in the previous SNSF AdG calls (Step 1 or 2) is permitted. However, previously submitted and evaluated proposals are not treated as re-submission, but as new proposals (i.e. no revision notes allowed).
- A researcher participating as principal investigator in an ongoing ERC frontier research grant project may not submit a proposal to the present SNSF Advanced Grants Call 2023 unless the existing project ends before the end of December 2025. An SNSF Advanced grant can only start once the previous ERC frontier research grant agreement has ended.

1.2 Host institutions

The host institution must be established in Switzerland as a legal entity (public or private). Higher education institutions or non-commercial research institutions outside the higher education sector who are domiciled in Switzerland and whose basic financing is predominantly Swiss according to Swiss law⁴ are eligible. Applicants do not need to be employed by the host institution when they submit the proposal; however, the host institution must commit to employ the applicant for at least the duration of the project. If the official retirement age (i.e. 65 years according to the Swiss law) will be reached during the project, the institution must explicitly confirm that they will employ the applicant also after the age of retirement and until the end of the project (please note the corresponding sentence in the host institution letter).

¹ e.g. public engagement in science, technology and knowledge transfer activities, scientific art performances

² e.g. spokesperson for international experiments, leader of international expeditions, founder of international networks and training programmes

³ e.g. maps, methods, prototype demos, software, databases, design, arXiv-articles, contributions to big data collaborations

⁴ Pursuant to [Article 5 RIPA](#) includes only non-commercial research institutions outside the university sector

The percentage of employment at a Swiss research institution must be at least 50% (0.5 FTE). Should Switzerland obtain the status of an associated country and participate in Horizon Europe after the deadline of this call, this constraint would be changed to '50% (0.5 FTE) of his/her total working time in an EU Member State or associated country'. Finally, the host institution will be the only participating legal entity.

Applicants are expected to dedicate a minimum of 30% of their working time to the SNSF Advanced Grant project.

Before applying, please discuss the conditions and procedure for conducting the project with the host institution. The latter must provide a commitment letter (please use the template provided in **mySNF**, see www.mysnf.ch).

2 Formal requirements, ethical issues and research integrity

2.1 Legal basis

The general provisions of the SNSF (Funding Regulations⁵ and the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations⁶) apply to the SNSF Advanced Grants Call 2023 and the corresponding funding procedures. This call document is issued by the Presiding Board of the National Research Council under a mandate from the SERI to set up a transitional measure for the ERC Advanced Grants Call 2023 (ERC-2023-AdG).

2.2 User account in mySNF

Applicants without an existing mySNF user account must open a new account. New user accounts must be registered **no later than two working days before the pre-registration deadline** (see Section 4 below). The mySNF account will remain in place for future submissions or the lifetime management of approved projects.

2.3 Ethics and integrity

Research activities and methods that have ethical implications or may raise questions requiring sound ethical assessment must be declared in mySNF. Hence, please take note of the Swiss laws and ethical standards⁷. Furthermore, the rules of scientific integrity must be respected⁸.

2.4 Open access

Under the SNSF Advanced Grants Call 2023, beneficiaries must ensure open access to all peer-reviewed scientific publications of their results as set out in the SNSF Funding Regulations⁵ and the Implementation Regulations⁶.

2.5 Open Research Data (ORD)

Under the SNSF Advanced Grants Call 2023, applicants must submit a data management plan (DMP) for funded projects. The SNSF also expects that data generated or collected during the project are publicly accessible in data repositories complying with the FAIR data principles, provided there are not legal, ethical, copyright or other issues, as set out in the SNSF Funding Regulations⁹ and the SNSF ORD Policy¹⁰.

⁵ https://media.snf.ch/UBa5QinDpnNjssV/snsf-funding_relations_2015_e.pdf

⁶ <https://www.snf.ch/media/en/B0SWnPsrDCRTaiCx/snsf-general-implementation-regulations-for-the-funding-regulations-e.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/786/de>

⁸ http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/ueb_org_fehlverh_gesuchstellende_e.pdf

⁹ Article 47 SNSF funding regulation

¹⁰ <https://www.snf.ch/en/dMILj9t4LNk8NwyR/topic/open-research-data>

3 Budget

SNSF Advanced Grants are awarded up to a maximum of CHF 1.9 million for a period of up to 5 years (overhead is calculated automatically and paid directly to the host institution). Applicants may request additional funding of up to CHF 870'000 for a) eligible installation costs in connection with the move to Switzerland due to the SNSF Advanced Grant, b) for the acquisition or utilisation of scientific infrastructure/major equipment, c) other major experimental and field work costs, excluding personnel costs. The maximum award is reduced *pro rata temporis* for projects of a shorter duration. Please use whole CHF integers only when indicating requested costs. All costs must be indicated in annual allotments.

3.1 Requested funding

Requested funding must be linked to the aims of the project for its entire duration. Resources should be requested in line with the requirements for the project and fully justified. The project cost estimation should be as accurate as possible. The evaluation panels assess the estimated costs carefully and are entitled to reduce unjustified budgets.

The requested funding must be displayed in the data containers containing requested funding on mySNF:

1. **Salary of applicant:** Applicants should indicate if they request a salary and social security and if so, should specify the amount according to the time dedicated to the project (for details see chapter 5.2).
2. **Requested positions:** Applicants should indicate the salaries and social security contributions for scientific and technical staff. When requesting positions for doctoral students, postdoctoral or technical posts, they should refer to the host institution's salary rates (i.e., "local rates") and social contributions¹¹
 - The size and composition of the research team must be indicated, mentioning the key team members and their roles. If team members employed by another host institution participate in the project, this should be justified concerning the additional financial costs for the project.
3. **Requested funding for the project:** Costs have to be subdivided in equipment (including, if applicable, costs for installation/purchase of major equipment/access to infrastructure) and research funds (consumables, field expenses, travel costs, conference costs, other direct costs and any envisaged sub-contracting costs). For the list of eligible costs, see the Annex, section 8.1.
 - All available resources for the realisation of the project and the required infrastructure and equipment have to be declared. Please include a short technical description of the equipment needed, together with a justification of its necessity.
 - A sub-contractor is a third party who carries out part of the project based on an agreement on business conditions. Costs generated by the third parties mandated by the research project (outsourcing through subcontracting) may be charged to the grant in exceptional cases pursuant to Clause 2.11 of the Implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations and must be fully justified in the "resources" section of the research

¹¹ https://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/allg_doktorierende_e.pdf

plan. Sub-contractors and costs for installation/purchase of major equipment/access to infrastructure must be clearly specified in the data container "Requested funding". **To do so, please use the drop-down list and select the corresponding category.**

Please note: Applicants are requested to indicate which available and additional funding they have requested at the SNSF or other funding institutions.

4 Pre-registration

Applicants have to pre-register by 15 December, 2023, 17:00 Swiss local time, by providing the following information via mySNF: a one-page summary of their research project, information about their host institution, an indication about the disciplines and at least three keywords of the planned project. The sections to be completed in mySNF are given in Box 2. Following the pre-registration, applicants have to send an e-mail to adg@snf.ch. The SNSF uses this information exclusively to prepare the evaluation process, for example to determine the composition of evaluation panels. The information will not be used in the evaluation of proposals.

Box 2. Mandatory pre-registration until 15 December 2023:

Please complete the following three sections in mySNF:

- 1) Designated host lab/institution
- 2) Basic data I (incl. project title, disciplines)
- 3) Basic data II (incl. summary, at least 3 keywords)

Important: you will have to send an e-mail to adg@snf.ch confirming the completion of your pre-registration.

5 Creating the documents for submission

All documents must be in English. The font must be Times New Roman, Arial or similar with a size of at least 11, single line spacing and margins of 2 cm on the side and 1.5 cm at the bottom. The documents must be submitted in PDF format.

5.1 Research plan

The research plan document must not exceed 14 pages (excluding references) and be uploaded in the mySNF data container "Research Plan". The research plan must be divided into two sections:

Section a: State-of-the-art and objectives. Specify the proposal objectives in the context of the state-of-the-art in the research field. It should be clear how and why the proposed work is important and what impact it will have if successful, such as how it may open up new directions or opportunities for science, technology or scholarship. Highlight any particularly challenging or unconventional aspects of the proposal, including multi- or inter-disciplinary aspects.

Section b: Methodology. Describe the proposed methodology in detail, including any key intermediate goals. Explain and justify the methods in relation to the state-of-the-art, and particularly novel or

unconventional aspects addressing the 'high-risk/high-gain balance. Highlight any intermediate stages where results may require adjustments to the project planning.

5.2 Resources

The resources document must not exceed three pages and must be uploaded to the mySNF data container "Resources". Further details on eligible and non-eligible costs are provided in the Annex (Section 8.1) below.

1. State the amount of funding considered necessary to meet the research objectives. The estimation of project costs should be as accurate as possible. The requested budget should be fully justified and in line with actual needs. Describe all the cost categories considered necessary for the project.
2. Specify your commitment in terms of the percentage of working time you are willing to devote to the proposed project (the minimum requirement is 30% of the applicant's work time) and, if applicable, the percentage of salary claimed under the grant. Please note, the personnel cost for the applicant cannot be higher than the percentage dedicated to the project.
3. Describe the size and nature of the team, indicating, where appropriate, the key team members and their roles. In case one or more team members are engaged by another host institution, their participation must be fully justified with respect to the scientific added value they bring to the project.
4. Include a short technical description of any requested equipment, why it is needed and the planned usage for the project.
5. Describe any additional funding requested for the project (max CHF 870'000). It needs to be indicated in the budget data container in mySNF (requested funding for project) and well justified for the successful implementation of the project.
6. Describe any existing resources not requiring SNSF funding that will be used for the project, such as infrastructure and equipment.

5.3 CV and major Achievements of the applicant

In order to comply with the DORA principles, the SNSF defined a new structure for the CV and requests a standardised set of information from all applicants. Specifically, applicants must compile their CV according to a new template on the SNSF Portal and subsequently upload a PDF in the data container "CV and major achievements".

The portal can be accessed under portal.snf.ch.

The Major Achievements part should list important achievements and emphasize the applicant's contributions to science. Contributions can cite a maximum of 10 important peer-reviewed publications or other works that impacted the applicant's research field. The publications should be adequately referenced, including all authors in the published order. Article-based bibliometric indicators of publications may be included in accordance with the DORA declaration¹². Journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors are not allowed. Contributions may also cite monographs, book chapters, art works and other output. The following should be added, if applicable and considered of importance by the applicant: granted patent(s); organisation of international conferences, outreach activities, general contributions to science, other artefacts with documented use (see also 1.1.1).

¹² <https://www.snf.ch/de/neSdcJ948w1y33Nj/thema/dora-deklaration>

5.4 Commitment of the host institution

Applicants must provide a written and binding commitment letter from the host institution confirming its willingness to host the proposed research for the whole duration of the planned project. Applications that do not include such institutional statements at the submission deadline will not be evaluated. Please use the template provided by the ERC or the SNSF. The SNSF template can be found on the mySNF platform. It must be uploaded to the mySNF data container "Confirmation host institute".

6 Submission of the application

To create a new application, please select the option "Create new application" on the mySNF homepage by navigating to the relevant funding scheme under **Programmes > Horizon Europe Transitional Measures > SNSF Advanced grants 2023**. The data on applicant and research proposal are entered in the mySNF entry mask. Receipt and verification at the SNSF

6.1.1 Verification of formal requirements and eligibility

Pre-registration: After receiving the applicant's e-mail that pre-registration is complete, the Administrative Offices of the SNSF will send a confirmation.

Online application: The Administrative Offices of the SNSF check whether the submitted applications meet the formal requirements and whether the applicant and the host institution are eligible. Proposals by eligible applicants are forwarded to the corresponding evaluation panel. If there is any doubt regarding eligibility that needs clarification, the proposal may be rejected on formal grounds even after the evaluation process has started.

6.1.2 Scientific integrity

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF may check whether the application respects the rules of scientific integrity (see 'Regulations of the National Research Council on the treatment of scientific misconduct by applicants and grantees'¹³).

6.1.3 Contacts between applicants and the SNSF

Queries can be addressed to the Administrative Offices of the SNSF by phone (+41 31 308 22 22 or e-mail to adg@snf.ch). When checking submitted applications, the office may contact applicants to clarify issues related to the application. Before, during and after the evaluation, the applicants are obliged to:

- provide any information requested by the SNSF
- cooperate in clarifying issues

The SNSF cannot give applicants any information on the evaluation of their proposals while the evaluation is in progress and until the decision is communicated in writing.

7 Evaluation and communication

A scientific steering committee (SNSF Transitional Measure Steering Committee), set up by the Presiding Board of the National Research Council, oversees the evaluation and funding activities related to the SNSF Advanced Grants call. It also ensures application of SNSF's best practices and compliance regarding conflicts of interest¹⁴. It is composed of the president of the National Research Council and representatives of each of the research areas (humanities and social sciences, biology and

¹³ http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/ueb_org_fehlverh_gesuchstellende_e.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.snf.ch/en/WJbZZ2p1vS1ZNnwI/page/theSNSF/evaluation-procedures/conflicts-interests-bias-and-withdrawal>

medicine, and mathematics, natural and engineering sciences) as well as members of the Specialised Committee Careers. The evaluation of the submitted proposals is based on the principle of competition. Discipline-specific panels will evaluate the proposals. The applications are assessed taking into account the expert reviews and the rebuttal letters, and ranked comparatively to the other applications.

7.1 Evaluation panels

The SNSF Transitional Measure Steering Committee will establish the panels based on the one-page summaries, the disciplines and the keywords provided by the applicants after the pre-registration phase. The panel chairpersons decide jointly with the SNSF Administrative Offices to which panel an individual proposal will be assigned. Applicants may list up to three persons who should not act as external reviewers in evaluating their proposal. Such requests must be well justified.

7.2 Evaluation procedure

The evaluation procedure follows the principles that guide the SNSF's evaluation practices:

- Individual voting: Every panel member casts a vote (independent, using the entire scale from 1-9).
- Random selection: Funding decisions on proposals of similar scientific quality around the funding line may be reached by drawing lots.
- Preselection for rejection: May be applied if a discussion of every proposal is not possible due to time constraints (high number of proposals).
- Separation of evaluation and funding decision: There will be a clear separation between scientific evaluation and funding decision.

Each proposal will be assessed in detail by selected panel members and external reviewers. Reviewers are generally international scientists and scholars in the relevant research fields who do not participate in the panel meetings and who deliver their structured assessments. Once the external review process is finalized, the reviews will be made available to the applicants who will have one week to write and submit a rebuttal letter commenting on the external experts. **The applicants will be informed directly by the SNSF Administrative Offices once the reviews are available and will be provided with all instructions and details regarding the letter and its submission.**

At least two panel members acting as referees independently evaluate and rate the research project's general scientific merit according to the criteria in Point 7.3 and the applicant's CV and major achievements taking into account the external reviews and the rebuttal letter. All members of the panel then discuss the proposal. Based on the written assessments of the external reviewers, the rebuttal letter as well as the written assessment of the panel members, and the discussions at the panel meeting, every panel member submits a score on a rating scale. Thus, the evaluation panel generates a ranking list of the proposals.

The proposals at the lower end of the ranking established based on the evaluation submitted by the referees before the meeting (based on the proposal documents and the written assessments of the external reviewers as well as the rebuttal letter), may be preselected for rejection (see also Organisational Regulations Art. 23 paragraph 4).

The panels will complete their evaluation with a report on every proposal. The SNSF will not reveal the identity of the reviewers to the applicants. The panel submits the final ranking of the proposals to the SNSF Transitional Measure Steering Committee, which formulates a funding proposal for approval by the SNSF Presiding Board and the SERI based on the ranking list and the available budget.

7.3 Evaluation criteria

The following criteria will be considered during the evaluation procedure.

7.3.1 *Scientific quality of the research project*

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project:

- The extent to which the proposed research addresses important unsolved scientific questions and technical challenges.
- The extent to which the objectives are ambitious, moving the field beyond the current state of the art (e.g., novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines).
- The extent to which the proposed research is high-risk/high-gain.

Scientific Approach

- The extent to which the outlined scientific approach is feasible, taking into account the high-risk/high-gain nature of the project.
- The extent to which the proposed research methodology is appropriate to achieving the goals of the project.
- The extent to which the proposal involves the development of novel methodology.
- The extent to which the proposed timescales, resources and PI commitment are adequate and properly justified.

7.3.2 *Qualification of the applicant*

Applicant - capacity and creativity

- The extent to which the applicant has demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research.
- The extent to which the applicant has the required scientific expertise and capacity to execute projects successfully.
- The extent to which the applicant has demonstrated sound leadership in the training and advancement of young scientists.

7.4 Outcome and communication of decisions

At the end of the evaluation period, all applicants will be informed about the outcome, i.e the rating of their proposal.

Applicants will receive a ruling. The ruling includes the score of their proposal and the panel comment explaining the decision. In addition, the external peer review documents will be made available in an anonymized way.

Proposals will be funded in order of priority based on their rank and the available funding. The funding of the projects **is expressly subject** to the financing decisions of the Parliament.

The ruling may be appealed against before the Federal Administrative Court.

8 Annex

8.1 Eligible costs

These costs support the research, management, training and dissemination activities necessary for the realisation of the project:

- **Personnel costs** cover the salary and social security contributions for the PI and salaries and social security contributions for scientific and technical staff (for PhD students' salaries, please refer to SNSF rates; for other collaborators, please refer to the SNSF salary rates of the host institution);
- **Material costs** that are directly related to the realization of the project, namely material of enduring value, expendable items, field expenses, travel costs or third-party charges; material, IPR costs;
- Costs for project-related **use of infrastructures** at institutions or laboratories;
- Costs for **sub-contracting**;
- Further costs provided for by the regulations and the terms of the call (see chapter 3).

Indirect costs are not included in the proposal form. The SNSF pays the host institution an overhead of 15% of the total direct eligible costs (excluding sub-contracting).

8.1.2 Non-eligible costs

These costs cannot be reimbursed through the grant, for instance (list is not exhaustive, just examples):

- Costs related to return on capital
- Debt and debt service charges
- Provisions for possible future losses of debts
- Interest owed
- Doubtful debts
- Currency exchange losses
- Excessive or reckless expenditure
- Costs reimbursed under an EU grant
- Publication costs
- Deductible VAT

8.2 Summary of deadlines

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Opening of the call | 6 November 2023 |
| Pre-registration deadline | 15 December 2023 |
| Submission deadline | 31 January 2024 |
| Invitation to write a rebuttal letter | Mid-August, detailed timelines will be announced in February 2024 |
| Communication of results | December 2024 |
| Earliest project start | 1 January 2025 |