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Guidelines on the profile, tasks and cooperation of the SNSF Foundation Council of 25 October 2024 (Foundation Council Guidelines)

1 General requirements

1.1 Fundamental principles

The Foundation Council is the supreme body of the Swiss National Science Foundation. It is responsible for the overall management of the Foundation and supervises the other bodies and organisational units. Its working methods are based on the Statutes and the Foundation Regulations.

The Statutes delegate funding decisions and funding policy to the Research Council. As the supreme body, the Foundation Council remains responsible for ensuring that the SNSF's purpose of funding research is implemented as effectively as possible. To do so, it must ensure that the SNSF is organised appropriately and ultimately ensure the regularity and quality of its research funding.

The Foundation Council is a strategic body. Its members monitor developments in research and research funding and are able, taking account of the circumstances, to set strategic guidelines for the Foundation's future activities. They act with the sole aim of fulfilling the Foundation's purpose effectively, and independently of any personal or institutional interests.

The Foundation Council decides as a collegiate body. Its committees do the preparatory work for decisions in their areas of responsibility and make recommendations.

The President / Vice President of the Foundation Council is supported in administrative and in organisational terms by the Administrative Offices, to which the President / Vice President is directly authorised to issue instructions.

1.2 Independence

The SNSF is an independent private grant-awarding foundation that is mandated and funded by the Swiss Confederation. Members of the Foundation Council do not represent any specific institution or scientific discipline in their work for the Foundation.

They are also personally responsible for the independence of the SNSF's funding decisions in their external and internal dealings, and avoid any appearance of bias in their actions (see Clause 2.7 below on conflicts of interest).

The members of the Foundation Council shall inform the Management Support team in advance of all their interests and senior positions in other organisations. These shall be published. Immediate notice must be given of any changes.

1.3 Reputation and removal

Members of the Foundation Council shall be professionally and socially committed and high-profile individuals who enjoy credibility and repute both within and outside their professional sphere.

The members of the Foundation Council shall protect the good reputation of the SNSF by always displaying integrity in their dealings within and outside the Foundation.

The members of the Foundation Council may be removed for good cause.¹ In order to avoid this happening, the members shall give notice to the President of the Foundation Council at an early stage that good cause might possibly arise.

Good cause includes in particular:

- a. allegations of a breach of scientific integrity;
- b. any breaches of official and business secrecy committed;
- c. inability to exercise their office properly for personal, time-related or organisational reasons;
- d. instigation of proceedings or preliminary investigations of a criminal nature.

1.4 Teamwork

The principle of teamwork is of crucial importance to all activities within the Foundation. It characterises the working practices in the Foundation Council as well as the cooperation between the Foundation Council members and the Executive Management.

The President of the Foundation Council shall head the body and chair the meetings. They shall coordinate the work in the team, in particular ensuring an appropriate division of tasks in the committees, commissions and working groups. They shall ensure that all members of the Foundation Council contribute their expertise openly and that a culture of 'speaking up' prevails.

2 Profile and principles of cooperation

2.1 Professional expertise

Members of the Foundation Council shall be recognised experts in their professional areas of activity. The composition of the Foundation Council is determined by the tasks that the Foundation Council has to fulfil.

The following specialist skills should be appropriately represented in the Foundation Council:²

- experience in science and research
- proven knowledge in the overall management of larger organisations in financial, organisational and legal respects
- knowledge of Swiss and European research policy

The SNSF Foundation Council shall be diverse in its composition in order to assess the challenges facing the SNSF from the various relevant perspectives and to ensure a constructive discourse in general. However, the Foundation Council is explicitly not a body representing the interests of individual institutions (see Clause 1.2 on independence).

The Foundation Council shall regulate the specific competencies of the members of the Foundation Council in the general profile for the Foundation Council.

¹ Art. 12 Statutes.

² Art. 5 para. 4 Statutes.

2.2 Time-related demands

Members of the Foundation Council shall ensure that they have sufficient time available for Foundation business. They shall participate in the meetings in person and shall prepare themselves appropriately.

Normally, the work of a member of the Foundation Council takes up 8 to 12 working days each year:

- 4 to 6 half-day meetings
- a two-day strategy workshop
- studying files
- participation in committees for 4 to 6 half days
- visits to projects / initiatives

2.3 Remuneration

Members of the Foundation Council shall be paid a flat fee that covers preparing for and attending the meetings of the Foundation Council. In addition, the members shall be paid their expenses (see Compensation Regulations).

2.4 Leaving the Foundation Council before expiry of term of office

If a member of the Foundation Council intends to leave the Foundation Council before their term of office expires, they shall normally give notice of this to the President / Vice President a year before their planned departure.

2.5 Renewal and quality

The Foundation Council shall plan its phased renewal. It shall discuss its composition and renewal once a year. It shall combine this with a regular self-evaluation of its work, taking account of external evaluations of the SNSF.

The election procedure for new members of the Foundation Council is determined by the Foundation Regulations.

Following their election, new Foundation Council members shall sign a declaration of acceptance of election. They shall thereby declare themselves to be ready and able to fulfil the purpose of the Foundation, to carry out the federal mandate and to take responsibility for the overall management of the Foundation.

New Foundation Council members shall be given an introduction by the Administrative Offices and the President / Vice President to the work and working methods of the SNSF. The fundamental documents and information shall be held in a joint repository for the Foundation Council.

The Foundation Council shall ensure that its members have the required expertise and undergo continuing education and training in relation to the latest working and management practices in foundations.

2.6 Foundation governance

The Foundation Council shall be aware of the importance of the SNSF, its exceptional capacity to act (simple and rapid lines of decision, risk capacity, etc.) and the associated demands on foundation governance.

The Foundation Council shall observe the requirements under private and constitutional law and the principles and recommendations relating to foundation governance (Swiss Foundation Code).

2.7 Conflicts of interest

The Foundation Council shall decide on mandates assigned to members of the Foundation Council that go beyond their ordinary activities as Foundation Council members and which involve exceptional work that is to be remunerated; the member concerned shall recuse him- or herself. The level of the remuneration for exceptional work is governed by the Compensation Regulations.

When dealing with business, Foundation Council members shall inform the Foundation Council as soon as possible and proactively of any possible concerns or any conflicts of interest.

Foundation Council members may apply for funding from the SNSF in accordance with Article 20 paragraph 2 of the Foundation Regulations. The Foundation Council shall review the applications submitted by and grants awarded to Foundation Council members each year. If there is a risk of structural dependence in terms of Article 20 paragraph 2 of the Foundation Regulations, the Foundation Council member concerned shall submit the planned project to the Foundation Council before filing an application.

2.8 Interests and dual mandates in particular

The Foundation Council shall be informed as soon as possible about any new vested interests and mandates in other organisations entered into that require to be disclosed on the SNSF website (Article 4 Foundation Regulations).

Dual mandates are prohibited by Article 15 paragraph 3 Foundation Regulations, whereby:

- Letter a prohibits direct overall management and supervision of research institutions in the narrow sense (main purpose).
Examples: director/principal of a university, university of applied sciences or other research institution, membership of the board of a university, university of applied sciences or other research institution in the ETH Domain.
Examples where the rule does not apply: member of an advisory body to research institutions (exclusively advisory tasks), management member of a university hospital.
- Letter b relates to the management and supervision of institutions whose purpose according to their statutes or whose actual activities represent the interests of a specific field ('Fachgesellschaften') and in doing so normally achieve a national effect.
Examples: member of the academic board of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences or the Swiss Society of Sport Science SGS.
Example where the rule does not apply: chair of the Swiss Society for ADHD (purpose according to the statutes: Information/knowledge exchange/basic and continuing education and training /public relations in relation to ADHD/support for research).

3 Communication

3.1 Internal communication

The Foundation Council has the right to receive rapid and comprehensive information from the Executive Management, the Research Council and the Delegates Assembly. Members of the Foundation Council shall be expected to contribute their external expertise actively and in a constructively critical manner.

The individual members of the Foundation Council shall raise issues at the meetings of the Foundation Council. They shall normally avoid direct contact with employees of the Administrative Offices outside the meetings.

3.2 External communication

The President / Vice President shall communicate with external parties, in particular on matters related to research funding or funding policy. Communication shall be coordinated with the Administrative Offices in order to ensure that the superordinate interests of the SNSF are safeguarded.

The President / Vice President may delegate communication to the Administrative Offices or individual members of the Foundation Council.

Media enquiries shall be coordinated and answered by the Communication Section of the Administrative Offices. In the case of enquiries on matters of overarching institutional interest, the Directors and the President / Vice President shall be informed and a decision taken on the response and on any further steps. The Foundation Council shall be regularly informed.

The SNSF shall in its communications have regard to the principles of continuity, transparency, truthfulness, appropriateness, objectivity, coherence, dialogue and legitimacy.

These Guidelines were approved at the Foundation Council meeting on 25 October 2024.