

National Centres of Competence in Research NCCR

Call document 6th call

Deadlines

Declaration of intent: 15 February 2024

Outline proposals: 15 April 2024

Full proposals: 3 February 2025

Start of research: Between March and May 2026

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1 The NCCR funding scheme

National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCRs) are research consortia conducting innovative and outstanding research with a long-term perspective. The NCCR funding scheme aims to sustainably strengthen Swiss research in strategically important fields. NCCRs may run for 8 to 12 years, and their duration is divided into four-year phases, which includes a potential third phase of flexible duration. Based on the Research and Innovation Promotion Ordinance (RIPO)¹, the NCCRs have the following aims:

- The maintenance and sustainable strengthening of Switzerland's position in research fields of strategic importance through the promotion of research of the highest quality.
- The sustainable renewal and optimisation of research structures through the creation of additional research and teaching capacities, promoting the cooperation among the Swiss research institutions and international networking.
- The implementation of a coherent strategy for research and for the five structure-related areas knowledge & technology transfer, education & training, equal opportunities, communication & outreach and open science.

Every NCCR proposal requires the explicit support of one or more recognised Swiss higher education research institutions, which host the NCCR as home institutions. In line with the aims stipulated above, home institutions support structural developments and supplement the funding provided by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) with their own contributions.

Since 2001, 42 NCCRs have been established. A list of the ongoing and concluded NCCRs is available on the SNSF website.²

2 Key information about the call

The 6th call for NCCRs is thematically open to all scientific areas. Proposals must focus on a clearly designated and thematically defined research topic of national interest.³

2.1 Scope of the call

The overall available funding will permit the launch of an expected 6 to 9 new NCCRs. NCCRs of the 6th call may run for between 8 and 12 years and request SNSF funding of between 8 and 20 million Swiss francs for the first four-year phase. Within this range, proposals for smaller NCCRs – in terms of consortia size and/or budget – and proposals with a shorter duration are also explicitly welcomed. All proposals must comply with the aims of the NCCR funding scheme. The requested funding and overall duration must correspond to the scientific and structural goals elucidated in the NCCR proposal.

Home institutions are expected to make an adequate contribution. An overview of the funding levels of previously launched NCCRs can be found on the SNSF website.⁴

¹ See Section 3 RIPO https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/814/en#chap_1/sec_3

² <https://www.snf.ch/en/EcRzGqwFJMZjfnNc/page/national-centres-of-competence-in-research-nccrs>

³ See Art. 10 (1) RIPO: https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/814/en#art_10

⁴ <https://data.snf.ch/key-figures/nccr>

2.2 Overview of the selection procedure

The selection procedure comprises four steps:

1. The applicants submit a declaration of intent.
2. The subsequently submitted outline proposal presents the goals and potential of the envisaged NCCR. Each outline proposal must be accompanied by a letter of support from the home institution(s). The SNSF evaluates the proposals based on an international peer-review process and discussions in thematic panels.
3. Applicants who receive continued support from their home institution(s) after the outline proposal evaluation submit a full proposal. Full proposals are peer-reviewed and discussed in interdisciplinary panels. At this stage, applicants are invited for an interview with the evaluation panel. Based on the evaluation outcome, the SNSF proposes an unranked shortlist to the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) for funding.
4. The SERI evaluates the shortlisted proposals with regards to research and higher education policies and depending on the overall available budget formulates a recommendation for the attention of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER). The EAER makes the final selection and launches the new NCCRs.

2.3 Timeline and deadlines for the 6th NCCR call

Date	Procedure
15 February 2024	Submission of declarations of intent via mySNF and confirmation by email to nccr@snf.ch
15 April 2024	Submission of outline proposals via mySNF
April – September 2024	Outline proposal evaluation
September 2024	Communication of the evaluation outcome by the SNSF to the responsible applicants and home institutions
November 2024	Submission of declarations of intent to submit a full proposal by email to nccr@snf.ch
03 February 2025	Submission of full proposals (submission platform to be defined)
February – September 2025	Full proposal evaluation
September 2025	The SNSF submits a shortlist for the attention of the SERI. Communication of the evaluation outcome by the SNSF to the responsible applicants and home institutions
January 2026	Final decision and communication of the outcome by the EAER
March to May 2026	Start of new NCCRs

3 Legal framework and conflicts of interest

3.1 Legal basis

This call document is issued by the Presiding Board of the National Research Council under a mandate from the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). The following legal bases apply in particular to the 6th NCCR call and the corresponding funding procedures:

- Federal Research and Innovation Promotion Act (RIPA)⁵
- Research and Innovation Promotion Ordinance (RIPO)⁶
- Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER) Ordinance on the RIPO⁷
- The SNSF Funding Regulations and the General Implementation Regulations for the Funding Regulations⁸
- Project Funding Regulations⁹
- Regulations on scientific misconduct¹⁰

3.2 Conflicts of interest

In order to identify conflicts of interest (Cols) of the members implicated in the evaluation of NCCR proposals, the SNSF applies large consortia-specific rules. For the exclusionary decision, the role of the applicants is considered in a differentiated manner. Particular relevance is given to members of the team of directors. In addition, the number and type of joint publications as well as the number of authors on the respective article are taken into account. A co-authored publication must reflect a collaboration of significant intensity of the involved researchers to qualify as a Col. Accordingly, a limited number of joint publications with individual PIs on the NCCR proposal may not be considered a Col. The SNSF applies the following constellations for the identification of a collaboration of significant intensity:

- Team of directors: Collaborations or joint publications in the past 10 years
- Principal investigators (PIs): Collaborations or joint publications in the past 5 years
- In justified cases, the SNSF may waive this rule if the collaboration is judged to be of low significance

The SNSF checks for potential Cols when selecting external reviewers and panel members. In addition, the SNSF requests systematic and extensive self-declarations – disclosing all links with the NCCR directors and PIs – for all parties involved in the evaluation process. The self-declarations will be updated throughout the whole process.

For the members of the Programmes Division of the SNSF Research Council the following Col rules apply:

- Exclusion from the entire evaluation process if they are implicated in one of the proposals as PI
- Recusal from the discussion of proposals where a member of the team of directors is affiliated with the same institution

4 Requirements for applicants and home institutions

The following sections include important information for the formation of the NCCR consortium. They describe the roles and define the eligibility requirements and restrictions for the team of directors and principal investigators, respectively.

⁵ <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/786/en>

⁶ <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/814/en>

⁷ <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/815/de> (German) or <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/815/fr> (French)

⁸ <https://www.snf.ch/en/lqmbmJEUNlpydenH/page/funding/directaccess/revision-funding-and-implementation-regulations>

⁹ <https://www.snf.ch/en/nZglcM3pAvSR8Oik/page/funding/documents-downloads/regulations-project-funding>

¹⁰ https://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/ueb_org_fehlverh_gesuchstellende_e.pdf

4.1 Diversity

The SNSF recognises that diversity can significantly enhance excellence in research. NCCRs should aim for an exemplary gender balance within their consortia, especially for leading positions. As part of the full proposal, applicants are expected to provide an ambitious gender balance plan, whose implementation will be evaluated by the SNSF throughout the NCCR's lifetime.

NCCR applicants are furthermore encouraged to include groups from different types of institutions that can make substantial contributions to the proposed topic (e.g. Federal Institutes of Technology, cantonal universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education).

4.2 Team of directors

The NCCR director, the co-director(s) and the deputy (co-)directors form the team of directors. The NCCR director represents the consortium vis-à-vis the SNSF, submits the requested information and documents as responsible applicant to the SNSF, and signs the NCCR contract in the event of approval. NCCRs can have one or several co-directors. They are jointly responsible for the scientific and managerial leadership of the NCCR. The designation of co-directors is mandatory for NCCRs supported by more than one home institution: each home institution must be represented with at least one director or co-director. Every director and co-director has a deputy. Deputy (co-)directors act as substitutes to the (co-)directors ((co-)directors cannot replace each other). The details of the organisation and governance structure will be regulated in the internal rules of procedure of the NCCR after its approval and are communicated to the SNSF.

4.2.1 Eligibility requirements for members of the team of directors

The eligibility criteria of the SNSF project funding apply for all NCCR applicants (see Regulations on Project Funding, article 3).¹¹ Additionally, members of the team of directors must hold a permanent position at a recognised home institution (see section 4.4). They are internationally renowned researchers with proven experience in research management. To ensure adequate management, the NCCR director invests at least 30% (0.3 full time equivalent (FTE)) to leadership tasks. Being an NCCR director is a long-term role, and the designated director must commit to this responsibility. Therefore, the NCCR director commits to leading the NCCR for at least the first four years. In cases where the director will retire shortly after phase I, a successor must already be designated in the initial proposal. Co-directors commit to an extent that is adapted to their organisational role in the NCCR.

4.2.2 Further restrictions for members of the team of directors

Members of the team of directors cannot be members of a competing proposal of the same NCCR call (neither as a member of the team of directors nor as principal investigator). Members of the Programmes Division of the SNSF Research Council (resp. of the programme committee responsible for the NCCR instrument in the framework of the new SNSF organisation as of 2025) are not eligible for the team of directors of an NCCR proposal. There are no restrictions for members of other SNSF Research Council Divisions (resp. of other programme committees). Members of the SNSF Foundation Council are not eligible for the team of directors of an NCCR proposal.

4.3 Principal investigators (PIs)

The PIs are responsible for one or several of the individual projects running within the NCCR. Some of the PIs will also assume responsibility for one of the structure-related areas (knowledge & technology transfer, education & training, equal opportunities, communication & outreach, open science)¹². The members of the team of directors are usually also PIs, leading their own individual projects in the NCCR. The SNSF expects full commitment of all PIs towards the funded NCCRs.

¹¹ <https://www.snf.ch/en/nZglcM3pAvSR8Oik/page/funding/documents-downloads/regulations-project-funding>

¹² For more details see https://www.snf.ch/media/en/ucxwlr5vxyBUTWn3/NCCR_structural_measures.pdf

4.3.1 Eligibility requirements for PIs

For the role as PI, the eligibility criteria of the SNSF project funding apply (see Art. 3 of the Regulations on Project Funding, article 3).¹³ Applicants from institutions outside Switzerland are eligible if scientifically well justified. As general rule, not more than about 10% of the PIs should come from foreign institutions, and their participation should be limited to one funding period (i.e. four years). Exceptions to these two limitations are possible if well justified.

4.3.2 Further restrictions for PIs

Participation of members of the Programmes Division (resp. of the programme committee responsible for the NCCR instrument as of 2025) as PI in an NCCR proposal is possible. Due to considerable conflicts of interest, they will remain excluded from the entire evaluation procedure.

4.4 Requirements for home institutions

An NCCR can be hosted by more than one home institution, provided that all home institutions involved make an adequate financial and structural contributions. The institution employing the NCCR director hosts the NCCR management and assumes the central administration of the funds.

All recognised Swiss higher education research centres pursuant to Art. 4c RIPA¹⁴ are eligible as home institutions:

- The Federal Institutes of Technology and the research centres of the ETH domain.
- Universities, universities of applied sciences, universities of teacher education and other institutions in the higher education sector that are accredited under the HEdA.
- Research facilities of national importance which receive funding from the Confederation (Art. 15 RIPA).

Home institutions support NCCR proposals that are compatible with their long-term strategic planning. Each NCCR outline and full proposal must be accompanied by a letter of support from the home institution(s), including a detailed declaration of their financial and structural commitments (template provided by the SNSF). Home institutions commit to supporting the NCCR throughout its entire duration in terms of both funding and personnel and to participating in implementing the joint structural measures.

Structural developments in NCCRs may include (non-exhaustive list)¹⁵:

- Creating and extending research and service units, such as new research centres, national institutes, interfaculty structures, technical platforms or research networks.
- Re-orienting existing or creating new (assistant) professorships within the NCCR's research domain.
- Defining foci in education and research for the NCCR (e.g. course at undergraduate level or PhD programmes).
- Improving infrastructures, such as research infrastructures, databases, equipment, or workspace.
- Creating and extending cooperations with leading national and international research institutions in the relevant domain.

The SNSF expects the home institutions to develop their structural commitments in close collaboration with all relevant stakeholders in order to ensure their feasibility. This is particularly important for

¹³ <https://www.snf.ch/en/nZglcM3pAvSR8Oik/page/funding/documents-downloads/regulations-project-funding>

¹⁴ https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/786/en#art_4

¹⁵ For more details see https://www.snf.ch/media/en/ucxwlr5vxyBUTWn3/NCCR_structural_measures.pdf

measures that are dependent on the consent of institutional bodies such as faculties or departments. Financial contributions by the home institutions to the NCCR can be cash or in-kind.¹⁶

To ensure adequate management of the NCCR, the home institutions have to commit to releasing the NCCR director from other duties. An arrangement must be found that fits the director's research goals, career and personal circumstances. Relief of at least 30% (0.3 FTE) must be guaranteed. The co-director is relieved by their institution to an extent that is adequate to their organisational role.

It is expected that the home institutions support the NCCR applicants in their efforts to establish an exemplary gender balance within the consortium (including the NCCR leadership).

5 Stages in the submission process

5.1 General information about the submission of a proposal

Applicants without a mySNF user account must open one. New user accounts must be registered no later than two working days before the deadline for submitting the declarations of intent. The declarations of intent and outline proposals are submitted via mySNF. The platform for the submission of the full proposals will be communicated together with the outcome of the outline proposal evaluation.

In the application procedure on mySNF, the NCCR director is referred to as the "responsible applicant". Co-director(s), deputy director(s) and all PIs are entered under "other applicants". The roles of co-director(s) and deputy director(s) are indicated in the comment field.

5.1.1 Creating the documents for upload

As the proposals are evaluated by international experts, all information relevant for the evaluation of the proposal must be provided in English (including the support letters from the home institutions). The font must be Times New Roman, Arial or similar with a size of at least 10, and line spacing 1.5 must be used. Condensed fonts are not allowed. The documents must be submitted in a PDF.

CV (one PDF per applicant): applicants must compile their CV on the SNSF Portal and then upload a PDF in mySNF in the data container "CV and major achievements". Information is available on the [CV website](#) and on the [SNSF Portal](#). All members of the team of directors upload an additional document (see [template management experience](#)) describing motivation to lead the NCCR and their previous research management experiences.

5.1.2 Receipt and verification by the SNSF

After receiving the applicant's email that the declaration of intent is complete, the Administrative Offices of the SNSF will send a confirmation of receipt.

The scientific evaluation of the outline proposals and full proposals is preceded by a formal check. The Administrative Offices of the SNSF check whether the submitted outline and full proposals meet the formal requirements and whether the applicants and the home institution(s) are eligible.

¹⁶ Cash: Financial resources that the NCCR management has at its own disposal.

In-kind: Resources and funds that the NCCR management does not have at its own disposal. These include payments as well as work and services made available to the NCCR, e.g. the creation and supply of professorships by the home institution, equipment for the NCCR paid by the home institution, etc. See NCCR Budget Guidelines for more information: <https://www.snf.ch/media/en/IZeRSeBX86LybmOT/nccr-budgetrichtlinien-en.pdf>.

5.1.3 Scientific integrity

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF may check whether the application respects the rules of scientific integrity (see the 'Regulations on scientific misconduct').¹⁷

5.1.4 Contact between applicants and the SNSF

The designated NCCR director (responsible applicant) represents the NCCR vis-à-vis the SNSF. The SNSF communicates with the responsible applicant during the evaluation procedure.

Queries can be addressed to the Administrative Offices of the SNSF by phone (+41 31 308 22 22) or e-mail (nccr@snf.ch). When checking submitted applications, the office may contact applicants to clarify issues related to the application. The applicants are obliged to provide any information requested by the SNSF and cooperate in clarifying issues before, during and after the evaluation.

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.

5.2 Submission of declarations of intent

Applicants must submit a declaration of intent via mySNF by **15 February 2024**. For the declaration of intent, an outline proposal is created in mySNF and specific sections defined in Box 1 are completed. The submission of a declaration of intent is a mandatory step for the later submission of an outline proposal. The list of submitted declarations of intent will be communicated to the responsible applicants and the home institutions (title, team of directors, home institution(s)).

The sections to be completed in mySNF are given in Box 1.

Box 1. Mandatory declaration of intent by 15 February 2024

- Responsible applicant: Designated NCCR director
- Other applicants: Co-director(s) and deputy director(s); tentative list of leaders of individual projects; the functions NCCR co-director or deputy director can be indicated in the field "Function (title)"
- Basic data I: Title of the NCCR; research fields / disciplines
- Basic data II: Executive summary (background and rationale, overall objectives and aims, methods used/concepts/theories, envisaged results and impact on the research field); at least five keywords
- Home institution(s): Further home institution(s) can be registered as a remark
- Exclusion of reviewers: Applicants may list up to five persons who should not act as external reviewers in evaluating their proposals. Requested exclusions must be well justified. The SNSF may follow the requests for exclusion if the applicants provide valid reasons for excluding a particular reviewer.

Important: Send an email to nccr@snf.ch to confirm the declaration of intent.

Following the completion of the necessary sections in mySNF, applicants must send an email to nccr@snf.ch. The declarations of intent are not subject to a scientific evaluation. The SNSF uses them to find suitable reviewers and to organise its evaluation process.

5.3 Submission of outline proposals

Outline proposals are structured according to the [outline proposal template](#). They are submitted via mySNF by **5 p.m. CEST on 15 April 2024**. The documents for the outline proposal and the structure of the research plan are provided in Box 2.

¹⁷ https://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/ueb_org_fehlverh_gesuchstellende_e.pdf

Box 2. Documents included in the outline proposal

- Research plan [outline proposal template](#)

The research plan document must not exceed 15 pages (excluding references). The page numbers indicated in brackets for the individual sections are suggestions.

1. Executive summary (1 page)
2. Overall goals and mid- and long-term vision including (5 pages):
 - main research questions and their significance for science and society
 - analysis of the current research landscape (existing structures, networks, etc.) and elucidation of the critical mass, the strategic fit and the planned structural development within the home institution(s) and within Switzerland
 - mid- and long-term vision for the NCCR (beyond phase I and beyond SNSF funding)
 - planning and justification of the requested duration of the NCCR and the level of SNSF funding (between 8 and 12 years)
 - justification of the need for an NCCR to reach the goals
3. Research programme for the first four years including (7 pages):
 - state of the art, intended contributions to the state of the art, added value created by the NCCR, the innovative and interdisciplinary potential, international embeddedness
 - sketches of the individual projects: research questions, state of the art, intended contributions to the state of the art, contributions to the overall questions of the NCCR
 - If applicable: comment on potential ethical / legal issues
4. Concept for the organisation, management, and leadership of the NCCR (2 pages)
5. Bibliography of the research programme

- CVs and major achievements

- CVs, major achievements and experience in leading large research consortia for the members of the team of directors
- CVs and major achievements for the principal investigators

- Budget for the first phase of the NCCR [budget template](#)

- Estimate based on current planning
- Budget includes SNSF funds as well as funds from the home institution(s)

- Support from the home institution(s):

- [Template self-funding by the Home Institution](#)
- Optional letter of support with additional information
- Commitments by the home institution(s) must fit the scope of the proposal and the NCCR scheme

Note that in contrast to previous calls, the structure-related areas (knowledge & technology transfer, education & training, equal opportunities, communication & outreach, open science) will not be assessed at the outline proposal stage.

5.4 Submission of full proposals

Within two months of the information regarding the outcome of the outline proposal evaluation, the responsible applicants must inform the SNSF (by email to nccr@snf.ch) if they intend to submit a full proposal. The full proposal must be submitted by **5 p.m. CET on 3 February 2025**. Detailed information on the submission procedure and the template documents will be provided together with the results of the outline proposal evaluation. The list of submitted full proposals will be communicated to the responsible applicants and the home institutions (title, team of directors, home institution(s)). The documents for the full proposal and the structure of the research plan are explained in Box 3.

Box 3. Documents of the full proposal

- Research plan

The research plan document must not exceed 60 pages (excluding references).

1. Executive summary (1 page)
2. Reactions to outline proposal evaluation
3. Overall goals and mid- and long-term vision including:
 - main research questions and their significance for science and society
 - analysis of the current research landscape (existing structures, networks, etc.) and elucidation of the critical mass, the strategic fit and the planned structural development within the home institution(s) and within Switzerland
 - mid- and long-term vision for the NCCR (beyond phase I and beyond SNSF funding)
 - planning and justification of the requested duration of the NCCR and the level of SNSF funding (between 8 and 12 years)
 - justification of the need for an NCCR to reach the goals
4. Research programme for the first four years including (max. 40 pages):
 - state of the art, intended contributions to the state of the art, added value created by the NCCR, the innovative and interdisciplinary potential, international embeddedness
 - research plan for the individual projects: research question, state of the art, intended contributions to the state of the art, contributions to the overall questions of the NCCR
 - If applicable: comment on potential ethical / legal issues
5. Structure-related areas: Goals and planned measures:
 - Knowledge & technology transfer
 - Education & training
 - Equal opportunities
 - Communication & outreach
 - Open science
6. Organisation, management, and leadership of the NCCR
7. Bibliography

- CVs and major achievements

- CVs, major achievements and experience in leading large research consortia for the members of the teams of directors
- CVs and major achievements for the principal investigators

- Budget for the first phase of the NCCR

- Detailed budget for the first phase
- Budget includes SNSF funds as well as funds from the home institution(s)

- Support from the home institution(s):

- Template Self-funding by the Home Institution
- Optional letter of support with additional information
- Commitments by the home institution(s) must fit the scope of the proposal and the NCCR scheme

- Other supporting letters (optional)

6 NCCR evaluation procedure

6.1 Evaluation criteria

In both evaluation stages, the SNSF applies the evaluation criteria elucidated in Box 4:¹⁸ The plausibility of the structure-related measures is evaluated at the full proposal stage only.

Box 4. Evaluation criteria

Scientific quality, including topicality, innovation potential and interdisciplinary nature

- Quality of the planned research
- Redefinition of research in the field
- Potential for breakthroughs / new insights
- Potential for synergies and interdisciplinary research
- Strengthening of international position and embeddedness

Critical mass and added value of the NCCR

- Value added by the NCCR as compared to the sum of individual projects
- Scientific basis and critical mass of the research in Switzerland

Plausibility of the structure-related measures (knowledge & technology transfer, education & training, equal opportunities, communication & outreach, open science) (only evaluated at full proposal stage)

- Suitability and innovation potential of the proposed goals and measures

Management and leadership

- Qualifications of the team of directors
- Leadership and management concept / proposed organisation
- Potential to guide long-term development, including incentives and instruments to implement structural and scientific visions

Scientific achievements and suitability of applicants

- Qualifications and suitability of the team of principal investigators for the project

Plans for structural development

- Planned structural development at the home institution(s)
- Structuring effects beyond the home institution(s)

Appropriateness of the requested budget and commitment from home institution(s)

- Adequacy of the budget to reach the formulated aims
- Compatibility of the proposal with the strategic priorities and planning of the home institutions
- Appropriateness of contributions by the home institution(s)

Significance of the topic for research in Switzerland

6.2 Evaluation of the outline proposals

6.2.1 External peer review

Each outline proposal is evaluated independently by at least three external reviewers. Reviewers are international researchers in the relevant fields of the proposed NCCR who do not participate in the panel meetings and who deliver their structured assessments before the panel meeting. Suitable reviewers are identified based on the content of the declaration of intent and the outline proposal. Fewer than three reviews are acceptable, if – despite the efforts of the SNSF – it is not possible to obtain three reviews.

¹⁸ <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/815/de> (German) or <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/815/fr> (French)

6.2.2 Evaluation panels

Each outline proposal is evaluated by one of at least three thematic panels. The panels are set up by the Programmes Division of the Research Council based on the topics, disciplines and keywords provided by the applicants, and approved by the SNSF Presiding Board. They are chaired by experienced international researchers and by Swiss co-chairs (members of the Programmes Division of the Research Council), who ensure that the evaluation complies with the SNSF regulations and best practices. One member of the Projects Division will participate in each panel meeting as an observer. The observer may give input related to the research conditions in Switzerland. The panel chairs, co-chairs, and observers have no voting right. The panel compositions will be published four weeks prior to the evaluation meeting.

6.2.3 Evaluation procedure

The evaluation procedure follows the principles guiding the SNSF's evaluation practices. Each outline proposal will be assessed independently by two panel members acting as referees. After the discussions at the evaluation meeting, every panel member casts a vote (independent, using the entire rating scale). A ranking list for each panel is compiled based on the individual ratings of panel members.

6.2.4 Programmes Division of the SNSF

The Programmes Division decides based on the ranking list for each panel, which outline proposals should receive the recommendation to submit a full proposal.

6.2.5 Outcome of the evaluation and communication

The outcome of the evaluation will be conveyed in a letter to the applicants and their respective home institution(s) after the SNSF has concluded the evaluation of the outline proposals. These letters will be dispatched in September 2024 and contain:

- A general note on the evaluation and its outcome (number of outline proposals, distribution of ratings, etc.)
- An overall appraisal of the proposal's strengths and weaknesses based on the evaluation criteria
- The classification of the outline proposal (quintile)
- A recommendation on whether to submit a full proposal or not
- The anonymised external reviews

No formal decision is made at this stage. Every applicant of an outline proposal has the right to submit a full proposal, provided that the home institution(s) continue to support it and the further requirements for the submission of a full proposal are fulfilled. Comments on the external reviews or the appraisal by the Research Council are to be addressed in the full proposal.

6.3 Evaluation of the full proposals

6.3.1 External peer-review

Each full proposal is evaluated by at least five external reviewers. Fewer than five reviews are acceptable, if – despite the SNSF's efforts – it is not possible to obtain five reviews. Suitable reviewers are identified based on the content of the outline and full proposal. The reviewers of the outline proposal stage may be contacted again, and new reviewers will be added. The anonymised reviews are made available to the applicants prior to the interview.

6.3.2 Rebuttal / comment on the reviews

Based on the anonymised reviews, the applicants may draw up a rebuttal to resolve any misunderstandings or to propose potential solutions to specific criticisms (maximum two pages). The rebuttal will be

available to the full proposal panels and the Research Council. Simply disputing reviewers' comments or competences to defend one's proposal is not acceptable.

6.3.3 Evaluation panels

The full proposals will be evaluated by interdisciplinary panels. The panels are set up by the programme committee responsible for the NCCR instrument in the framework of the new SNSF organisation based on the topics, disciplines and keywords provided by the applicants, and are approved by the SNSF Academic Board of the Research Council. They are chaired by experienced international researchers and by Swiss co-chairs (members of the programme committee responsible for the NCCR instrument in the framework of the new SNSF organisation), who ensure that the evaluation complies with the SNSF regulations and best practices. One member of the committee for Project Funding will participate in each panel meeting as an observer. The observers may give input related to the NCCR funding scheme or research conditions in Switzerland. The panel chairs, co-chairs, and observers have no voting right. The panel compositions will be published four weeks prior to the evaluation meeting.

6.3.4 Interview

The SNSF Administrative Offices invite the NCCR director and co-director(s) for an interview, which is conducted by the full proposal panels. In this interview, the directors present their proposal with respect to the assessment criteria.

6.3.5 Evaluation procedure

The evaluation procedure follows the principles guiding the SNSF's evaluation practices. Each full proposal will be assessed independently by two panel members acting as referees.

The structure-related areas (knowledge & technology transfer, education & training, equal opportunities, communication & outreach, open science) are subjected to a cross-comparison among all proposals evaluated within the same panel.

After the interviews and discussions at the evaluation meeting, every panel member casts a vote (independent, using the entire scale). A ranking list for each panel is compiled based on the individual ratings of panel members.

6.3.6 Programme committee responsible for the NCCR scheme

Based on the panel's ranking list, the programme committee responsible for the NCCR instrument in the framework of the new SNSF organisation decides for each panel which full proposals should be on the shortlist recommended for funding. The unranked shortlist is ratified by the Academic Board of the Research Council and submitted to the SERI for final decision.

6.3.7 Outcome of the evaluation and communication

Responsible applicants whose proposals have not been recommended for funding will receive an official ruling. The respective home institutions receive a copy of the letter. The letter comprises:

- A general note on the assessment and the outcome (number of submitted full proposals, distribution of ratings, number of proposals shortlisted for the final assessment by the SERI, etc.)
- An overall appraisal of the full proposal's strengths and weaknesses based on the evaluation criteria
- The position in the overall ranking of their proposal

The applicants whose proposals have been shortlisted and their respective home institution(s) are informed accordingly by the SNSF.

6.4 Evaluation of the full proposals by SERI / decision by EAER

In accordance with Article 8 (2) of the EAER Ordinance on the Research Ordinance¹⁹, the SERI is responsible for evaluating the full proposals in terms of research and higher education policies. There is no scientific assessment at this stage. The evaluation is based on the following structural sustainability criteria:

- Compatibility of the NCCR with the home institution's strategic planning
- Division of work and coordination in the higher education sector
- Incorporation into the regional and national overall distribution of competence centres in accordance with the goals of the NCCR funding scheme
- Agreement with the federal government's research policy goals
- Embeddedness in Switzerland's international scientific cooperation agreements and cooperation endeavours at an institutional level

Bilateral meetings will take place between delegates of the SERI and each home institution (rector's offices) on the shortlist. The meetings enable clarification of any remaining questions regarding the structural developments and commitments as well as the compatibility of the NCCR with the strategic priorities and long-term planning of the home institutions.

The EAER will decide which NCCRs are to be established and define the financial framework for each NCCR. The EAER will inform the applicants about its decisions; this is expected to happen in early 2026.

7 Start of the selected NCCRs

According to current planning, the approved NCCRs will likely start between March and May 2026. After the EAER's positive decision, the SNSF will sign a contract with each party responsible for an NCCR (home institution(s), NCCR director, the leaders of the individual projects). Requirements set by the EAER / SERI or the SNSF may also be stipulated therein.

¹⁹ <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/815/de> (German) or <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/815/fr> (French)