From traditional funding schemes toward more out of the box research

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# Research funding at the SNSF

## Project funding
- Basic research projects
- Use-inspired basic research projects
- **SPARK**

## Programs
- National Centres of Competence in Research
- National Research Programs
- International co-operation
- **Sinergia**
- Bridge

## Careers
- From PhD to Assistant professor

## Infrastructures

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<th>Programs</th>
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<td>Basic research projects</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use-inspired basic research projects</td>
<td>22%</td>
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On this page, you will find all information relevant to the crisis. The page is regularly updated. Your questions on project deadlines and grants are answered in the FAQs.
Collaborative, interdisciplinary and breakthrough

Sinergia existed since 2009 as scheme for the promotion of collaborative research (small consortia of 2-4 applicants), and was reformed in 2016:

**New Aims**

- Promote **interdisciplinary** and **collaborative** projects that propose **breakthrough research**

**Requirements**

- Research across disciplinary boundaries and beyond existing models, theories or methods
- Goals can only be reached through the integration of elements from two or more disciplines
- Joint research approach of applicants with complementary expertise and knowledge
Sinergia scheme

Grant conditions
• 2 to 4 applicants and their groups collaborate closely in a network
• When 3 or 4 applicants, 1 can be based abroad, if expertise is not available in CH
• Grants for up to 3.2 Mio CHF for up to 4 years (typically 200’000 CHF per year and research group)

Call and evaluation
• Regular calls (every 6 months)
• International peer review and mixed committee to finalize the evaluation
Elements that foster out of the box research

- Requirement for collaborative, interdisciplinary, breakthrough research
- Promotion of the inclusion of more junior applicants
- Allowing international co-applicants
- Dedicated standing panel assuring a “Sinergia culture”. members are sensitized to issues of interdisciplinarity
- Special emphasis and weight given to the out of the box aspects on all levels (research plan, evaluation forms, evaluation meetings)
- Above average funding
Do we reach the goals?

YES, BUT

• Fulfilling all 3 criteria (BT, IDR, COLL) at once is very difficult.
• Smaller interdisciplinary projects with a single applicant have no specific funding scheme anymore.
• Bigger collaborative project, which are not BT or IDR have no specific funding scheme anymore.
• High-risk projects designed for 4 years and 3 Mio CHF need some contingency planning (also because of students employed in these projects) – the path to conservativism?
• 4 year high-risk projects too much of a risk for non-tenured applicants? Matthew effect?
Rapid, unconventional, short

Spark was established last year and runs as a trial. The SNSF implements in Spark innovative approaches in research funding.

Principles

• Funds the rapid testing or development of new scientific approaches, methods, theories, standards, innovation...
• Projects must show unconventional thinking
• The focus is on promising ideas of high originality, with minimal reliance on preliminary data.
• Taking risks is very welcome, but not a requirement in itself
• Incremental research or continuations of already ongoing research projects are not fundable through Spark
Spark scheme

Grant conditions

• Open to any (single) applicant with documented research experience (PhD or equivalent). No restrictions due to other SNSF projects.

• No need to be employed at time of application

• Project must be hosted by a Swiss research institution providing infrastructure

• 6 to max. 12 months project, budget of 50’000 to max. 100’000 CHF

• Eligible costs: applicant’s salary, project costs, salaries of employees (but no PhD students)

• Project must start at latest 4 months after funding decision

Call frequency

• No fixed calls, up to now 2 calls (Jul 2019, Mar 2020)

• Partly depends on available funds (reserves)
Spark evaluation procedure

• Project plan: 6 pages max. with summary), fully anonymized without mentions of identity, career stage, current or future institution of the applicant. No traditional CV or scientific output list is requested.

• International pool of experts. Each evaluates several applications.

• Evaluation criteria: originality, novelty of the idea / unconventionality of the proposed research project / scientific quality of the project / potential for significant impact.

• Final grade calculated based on the experts grades. They grade each proposal independently according to the following grades: A = excellent, B = very good, C = good, D = poor.

• No synoptic panel discussion.
Elements that foster out of the box research

- Need for unconventional idea
- Own salary can be paid by the grant
- No PhD students on the grant

- Double blind evaluation, CV not a criterion
- No panel discussions (with potential mainstreaming effect)
Do we reach the goals?

Nothing to say about outcomes yet, but input promising

- Overwhelming success: 757 applications in the first call, 897 in the second
- Different population of applicants (Matthew effect low): Majority of applicants <40, first time applicants and not professor. Comparably high share of applicants from Universities of applied sciences.
Do we reach the goals?

And challenges remain...

• Assuring a blind evaluation is a challenge and (currently) resource intensive (document metadata, self citations...)

• Many projects are incremental

• The term “unconventionality” is interpreted differently by different reviewers

• Establishing a final rating / ranking is challenging. What to do with discordant reviews?

• The first call showed a tendency for a gender effect in the success rates. Are “selling narratives” of projects gendered?
SNSF and Corona

• Special Call for Research into Coronaviruses

• National Research Programme “Covid-19”
Special Call for Research into Coronaviruses

• Initiated by the SNSF
• Addresses all disciplines
• Research on the virus, its spread, the illness, diagnosis and treatment,
• Research on the health system and on how the society as a whole deals with the epidemic.
• Grants may get up to 300’000 CHF for up to 24 months.
• All results will have to be openly accessible fast
• Speedy procedure: call, 6 March; submission deadline, 25 March; peer review completion, 30 April; decisions, mid May; project start, 1 June.
• Spark as model for the review process, i.e. no panel but only pool of experts.
National Research Programme “Covid-19”

• Initiated by the SNSF and the Swiss government, managed by the SNSF
• Focus on biomedical, pharmacological, epidemiological and clinical aspects
• National coordination of competences, international coordination with other programmes / networks
• The programme call will be complementary to the special call
• Publication of the call: 30 April
Information SNSF and SNSF-funded research

The database P³ contains data on research projects approved by the SNSF.
P³ currently contains:

72,476 Projects
101,150 People
121,393 Publications

Explore the P³ data through interactive visualizations

http://p3.snf.ch/

www.snsf.ch