



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Federal Department of
Economic Affairs, Education and Research EAER

**State Secretariat for Education,
Research and Innovation SERI**
National Research and innovation

Mandate of the

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)

to the

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

concerning

Concept for the support of research infrastructures by the SNSF

1. Initial situation

In accordance with section 4.10. of the performance agreement between SERI and the SNSF for the period 2025–2028, the SNSF is hereby mandated to develop a concept with priorities and criteria for the support of research infrastructures (RI¹), including data infrastructures (DIS), longitudinal studies, and cohort studies.

This mandate is based on Article 10 paragraph 3c of the Federal Act on the Promotion of Research and Innovation (RIPA) which assigns the SNSF responsibility for promoting research infrastructures that support the development of fields of expertise in Switzerland and that do not fall within the remit of the higher education institutions (HEIs) or the Confederation.

With this mandate, the SNSF is asked to consider its role in the evaluation of RIs of national importance in their entirety (life cycle, eligibility and evaluation criteria, ecosystem knowledge, processes, etc.) and its role in the funding of RIs, including addressing a probable gap in the RI funding portfolio and complementing the support provided by HEIs and SERI.

The framework conditions for the funding of RIs by the SNSF are defined in the additional protocol to the performance agreement as follows:

The planned or existing RI:

- is primarily research-driven. This means that the infrastructure, along with its resources and services, is specifically geared towards scientific purposes. Specific skills are required for its proper construction, operation and use. It is utilised for research, teaching and promoting of young talent;
- fits sensibly into the national landscape of existing RIs and makes use of or promotes international synergies;
- is usually based at a higher education institution (host institution), forms part of its strategic planning and receives financial support from it (matching funds).

Furthermore, the following **basic principles** are relevant:

- The operation and financing of national RIs are, in principle, the **responsibility of the HEIs**.
- The SNSF provides support that **complements** the contributions of the HEIs, SERI, or other ERI actors. The SNSF may provide **subsidiary** funding of RIs by applying the matching fund principle (i.e. additional funding in cases where the establishment or operation of the RI cannot be fully financed by the HEIs themselves). This support is also complementary to funding priorities under Article 15 RIPA (SERI).
- The SNSF, in cooperation and consultation with SERI, which is responsible for funding participation in **international RI activities** at the ministerial level, formulates recommendations for exploiting international synergies.
- **SERI may mandate the SNSF** to support specific RIs (e.g. the national nodes in distributed RIs with the legal form ERIC) based on strategic documents.

¹ RI as defined according to [Regulation - 2021/695 - EN - EUR-Lex](#) Article 2 Definitions

2. Importance of research and data infrastructures

National and international RIs and DIS are becoming increasingly important. They provide essential foundations for the further development of specialist areas, for collaboration between researchers as well as between science, society and industry. They also support the development of new technologies and ensure that research can better address future challenges.

To clarify the terminology: DIS are generally considered a component of RIs. Each RI generates data as part of its activities. Therefore, only the term RIs is used below. A distinction between RIs and DIS is made only where it is relevant for funding purposes.

3. Topic and objective of the mandate

3.1. Topic

The SNSF has two primary tasks in the context of **supporting RIs**:²

- a) **Evaluation of RIs** with regard to national coordination: This task involves evaluating new RIs or major updates to existing RIs, as well as monitoring existing RIs (based on life cycle management). These activities are carried out within the framework of the process of the Swiss Roadmap for RI and include both national and international RIs, in particular the evaluation of participation in distributed RIs with the legal form ERIC and, more generally, international research infrastructures for which participation is deemed important at the ministerial level.
- b) **Funding of RIs**: This task complements the funding activities of other ERI actors (HEIs and academies) and SERI (Article 15 and international). It involves identifying, in consultation with the HEIs, gaps in the funding system for researchers or research domains that could lead to potential weaknesses in scientific output.

3.2. Objectives and mission of the mandate

SERI expects the SNSF to define **guidelines and principles** for its support of RIs and to specify the role of the SNSF in funding in the concept to be developed. In addition, the SNSF is expected to clarify what can be supported within an RI using SNSF funds, to simplify the complexity of the funding processes as far as possible, to identify and close possible funding gaps, and to address the long-term nature of the funding.

The mandate consists of the following two main parts:

Part 1: Development of a basis for RI evaluation as a contribution to the national coordination process (context: roadmap), including

- i. Definition of guidelines and principles for the evaluation of RIs, in line with international standards and the ongoing work of ERI actors (Round Table Roadmap).
- ii. Design of an evaluation process in accordance with current international standards.

Part 2: Clarification regarding the funding of RIs, including

- i. Clarification of how funding from the SNSF can complement support from HEIs, with the primary objective of enhancing scientific excellence (discipline-dependent) of research in Switzerland.
- ii. Clarification and definition of the SNSF's funding scope, including identification of funding gaps.
- iii. Specification of which costs can be covered by the SNSF when funding RIs, which must be borne by the HEIs / host institutions or third parties, and the conditions that must be met for the SNSF to provide funding.

² Supporting RI = providing direct assistance, whether financial, technical, or operational, including therefore evaluation, funding, support for data organisation, FAIRification etc.

- iv. Definition of appropriate funding approaches and incentives to encourage coordination among RIs, with a view to consolidating the RI landscape.

The results of this work will be summarised in a final report by 30 June 2026 and consolidated in coordination with the 2029–2032 multi-year plan (MP). (For the timetable, see section 4)

3.3. Goals of the concept

As part of the development of the basis in the two parts described in section 3.2., SERI also expects the concept to provide answers to the following questions:

Part 1: Development of a basis for RI evaluation as a contribution to the national coordination process (context roadmap)

- Definition: What are the commonly defined requirements for eligibility? How are the commonly defined definitions implemented in the evaluation?
- How can aspects like governance and feasibility be taken into consideration in the evaluation process?
- Periodic evaluation and review of existing RI: what are criteria and requirements for further funding or phasing-out decisions?

Part 2: Clarification regarding the funding of RIs

- **Principles** of funding of RIs by the SNSF:
 - How are specific funding priorities set by the SNSF and how are the strategic priorities of the HEIs taken into account?
 - What are the framework conditions for funding RIs by the SNSF? (temporary / start-up or long-term funding etc.)
 - What kind of costs can the SNSF cover when funding RIs (types of costs for RIs: what is not included and is / must be financed elsewhere)?
 - What is the relationship between the promotion of RIs and the promotion of data management (data services, repositories, cloud solutions or data analysis centres, etc.)?
- **Coordination:**
 - How does the SNSF ensure optimal coordination with other ERI actors and specially with the HEI?
 - How does the SNSF ensure optimal coordination among RIs (synergies)?
 - How can synergies with international RI planning and the design of the landscape be better utilised for specific funding by the SNSF?
- Existing instruments and **gaps** in support / funding:
 - What funding instruments does the SNSF need to create in addition to the HEIs (incentives for coordination)?
 - What funding gaps exist in the research infrastructure system and how can they be closed within the responsibility of the SNSF (e.g. funding for medium-sized RIs – consultation with HEIs would be important here in order to be able to define gaps)?
- How to gain more opportunities for **innovation / flexibility** and still maintain stability and a long-term perspective?

4. Timetable / duration of the mandate

According to the additional protocol to the 2025–2028 performance agreement, this concept with the principles for the funding of RIs by the SNSF is to be developed by 30 June 2026 regarding the next ERI period 2029–2032 and the results are to be coordinated with the multi-year plan.

The following stages are planned for reporting:

Steps / Products	Dates
Issue of mandate / kick-off	Until 30 June 2025
Mid-term discussion	As required, Q4 2025
Interim report	Until 31 March 2026
Discussion of interim report	April 2026
Final report to SERI (including basics in the MP)	Until 30 June 2026
Implementation Planning	Until 30 June 2027

5. Communication of the results and next steps

The mandate will be published on the SERI website.

The resulting concept will be integrated in the multi-year planning and presented in the context of the next ERI Dispatch 2029–2032 and consulted with the ERI partners via the regular consultation process.

The concept may be published in agreement with SERI after the consultation of the ERI Dispatch.

The SNSF will then draw up an implementation plan for the concept within the implementation of the SNSF Action Plan 2029–2032.

6. Contact persons

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