

SPI Flagship Initiatives

FAQ

This document summarized questions and answers specific to the SPI Flagship Initiative general framework and application process. The document will be updated regularly as new questions or aspects which require further clarification arise.

1. Scope and framework of SPI Flagship Initiatives:

What is a Flagship: many independent projects in the same geographical location OR interdisciplinary study centered around a process-cluster?

Flagships are built around the idea that a geographic focus (i.e. re-visiting the same region over several field seasons) is advantageous to maximise scientific synergies, optimise logistics and international collaboration. While it is in principle possible that research clusters are focused on the same region without strong thematic links, projects with interdisciplinary links between the research clusters are strongly encouraged. Proposals are also accepted for SPI Flagship Initiatives which visit field sites in different regions in order to conduct comparative studies.

Can a proposal entirely focus on a third pole region, e.g. the Andes or Central Asia?

Yes, the call for proposals is open to proposals targeting any region(s) in the Arctic, Antarctic, or remote high altitude regions. For proposals focusing on remote high altitude regions it is necessary to demonstrate high logistic needs and difficulty of access in order to be eligible. Alternatively, we encourage the consideration of combined remote high altitude regions studies with Arctic or Antarctic research in a comparative setting.

Could you give an example where the line would be drawn with a non-Swiss partner in terms of funding eligibility? (Example: I do measurements X on a glacier, and a non-Swiss partner institution does measurement Y that are supplementary. The pre-existing project did not explicitly mention the synergy. I now state that there is a synergy. Can travel, safety, etc. for the non-Swiss partners be covered?)

SPI Flagship Initiatives are designed to enable Swiss researchers to conduct fieldwork in remote polar and high-altitude regions. Thus, the majority of direct funding (i.e. travel) is reserved for Swiss-based participants.

At the same time, we acknowledge that international collaboration is fundamental to polar research. We encourage the involvement of international collaborators in individual research clusters and the integration of SPI Flagship Initiatives into existing international programmes and networks. International

collaborators can benefit from SPI Flagship Initiatives infrastructure, such as safety and support in the field, and participate in meetings and workshops held in Switzerland.

To directly address the above example, the envisaged solution would be for the non-Swiss partner to 'pay their own way' to the field site but benefit from SPI-Flagship Initiative infrastructure in the field.

Can you elaborate more the inclusion possibilities of indigenous and local peoples?

Ideally, indigenous peoples would actively participate in co-designing the research and research goals of a SPI Flagship Initiative or a specific research cluster and / or the conceptualization of outreach work. Please see the [IASSA Principles and Guidelines for Conducting Ethical Research in the Arctic](#) and the [Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee Principles for Conducting Research in the Arctic](#) as recently revised codes of conduct promoting mutual respect, communication and partnerships between researchers and northern residents. These guidelines apply equally to indigenous and local people at research sites outside the Arctic.

Does research performed within the framework of a SPI Flagship Initiative have to be directly relevant to Switzerland? (example: if one was to study the effects of pollution on an indigenous community there might not be a direct link of this research to Switzerland)

No, it is not required that scientific research performed within the framework of a SPI Flagship Initiative is directly or immediately relevant to the Swiss public.

Can the scientific assistant and project managing assistant be the same person?

The positions of scientific assistant and programme managing assistant were designed with two persons in mind: A partial salary for a scientific assistant can be part of a SPI Flagship Initiative budget, acknowledging that a PI would need someone working very closely with him/her in order to manage the scientific coordination of such a large. At the same time, a scientific assistant to the PI should not be overwhelmed with purely administrative work inherent to any programme of this scale and consequently the SPI will directly hire and pay a programme managing assistant to assist the PI with such work. That being said, we do want to give applicants as much freedom as possible to define the role and responsibilities of the PIs assistants, such that their work can be of most benefit to the success of the programme. As such, a scientific assistant likely is, but does not have to be, a member of the PIs research group and it is up to the PI to define how much of the overall budget will be used for his/her salary and what tasks are most suitable to be performed by this person. The programme managing assistant of a Flagship Initiative will be paid directly by the SPI (50%). While this person would be more responsible for administrative aspects of the programme, he/she can have a scientific background or be scientifically involved in the programme. To directly answer the above question, while it was not foreseen that the scientific and programme managing assistant would be the same person, it is not impossible if argued well.

Can there be two co-PIs instead of just one single PI (irrespective of the sub-PIs of each research cluster)?

While we envisioned one single PI for SPI Flagship Initiatives, we do not exclude the possibility of sharing this position between two co-PIs. The specific advantages of such governance would have to be well argued within the pre-proposal and the evaluation panel could recommend that one single PI would be

preferable. In any case, only a single grant agreement and financial contract will exist between the SPI and each Flagship Initiative.

2. SPI Flagship Initiatives proposal and definition process:

Can the scientific assistant be recruited after eventual acceptance of the SPI Flagship Initiatives proposal?

Yes. As the position requires the scientific assistant to work closely with the PI, we anticipate that the person will be a member of the PIs research group. Who exactly will take the job does not necessarily have to be defined in the proposal. The proposal budget however needs to clearly state the amount of funding going towards a partial salary for a scientific assistant.

Is it possible to join a proposal as sub-PI after the pre-proposal stage?

Yes. While only applicants (PIs) of a pre-proposal can be invited to submit a full proposal, the number of research clusters and sub-PIs can change between the pre-proposal and full proposal stage.

The PI must be a "senior" scientist/professor: could you better specify this requirement?

The PI of a Flagship Initiative must be Swiss-based and affiliated to a Swiss public research institution. He / She must be well established in the Swiss polar research community and have the level of seniority at their home institution which allows him / her to lead multi-year programmes with the level of funding available through SPI Flagship Initiatives.

What does it mean that the PI and co-PIs of a programme should be "affiliated to a Swiss research institution"?

Beyond legal affiliation, it is crucial that a leading figure in an SPI Flagship initiative spends a significant amount of his/her working time in Switzerland and is embedded in the Swiss research landscape in such a way that his/her leadership in the SPI Flagship Initiative strengthens Swiss polar research.

How many pre-proposal applicants are expected to be invited to submit a full proposal?

This depends somewhat on the number and quality of pre-proposals. With the two-stage proposal process we want to avoid applicants with very little chance of success to spend time writing a full proposal. However, it is important that a certain degree of competition between proposals remains during the full proposal stage. At the very most, we expect 10 applicants to be invited to submit a full proposal.

Is the composition of the evaluation panel public?

The panel has a strong scientific background, but also includes experts on polar logistics. The names of members of the evaluation panel will not be made public.

Is there any SPI-event/activity planned for exchange of pre-proposal ideas/plans etc. for helping/coordinating formation/development of the pre-proposals within the next few weeks? Or would it maybe be possible to at least get the list of the participants of these SPI workshops?

A list of participants of the information events will be circulated as a google doc, including email addresses. There is also a column in which each participant can specify their expertise / research interest and how they would like to be involved in a SPI Flagship Initiatives proposal. If desired, the SPI can assist

with the organisation of online meetings during the pre-proposal stage and/ or have a representative at such meetings. Please contact us if you would like to discuss options.

Does the logistic and infrastructure provider have to be part of the project consortium or do they remain as third parties?

This depends on the exact nature of the logistics or infrastructure in question. In the case of a logistical service provider payed through SPI Flagship Initiative (e.g. flights, guides, ...), the service provider itself would not be part of the SPI Flagship Initiative consortium. But it is possible that a SPI Flagship Initiative sets up a specific agreement with an existing polar infrastructure (e.g. a research station) to demonstrate a collaborative link.

We do however not envision SPI Flagship Initiatives to have a logistics cluster with a logistics sub-PI. In all cases, the funds payed for services need to be stated clearly in the budget and justified with an offer/quote in the full proposal.

3. Budgetary structure and co-funding:

How do you imagine will the matching funding work in terms of timeline? After a SPI Flagship Initiative is granted, can we then start to get additional funding or do you expect us to do that in parallel with the associated risk that neither turns out positively?

Scientific work performed within the SPI Flagship Initiatives will be dependent on co-funding from additional grants, and it is not expected that all such funds are secured at the beginning of a programme. An important characteristic of SPI Flagship Initiatives is their multi-annual nature, and we do not foresee the first field campaign to be scheduled right after the start of the programme.

The full proposal should include a clear vision of how the ideal funding scenario for a SPI Flagship Initiative will be achieved. Similarly, the description of scientific work to be performed within each research cluster should clearly show which work can be performed from existing funding and which depends on successful outcome of co-funding applications (plan A and plan B scenarios).

While we acknowledge that a double-jeopardy situation is created, we expect that after an applicant has been invited to submit a full proposal, the preparation of applications for co-funding can begin.

Re material and analyses costs: what does "not major mean"? To be truly innovative and interdisciplinary we need to go beyond what each group does anyway/routinely which bears some costs.

The majority of SPI Flagship Initiatives funding must go towards 'enabling measures' for field work in polar regions. The budgetary structure provided in the call for proposals (logistics 65%, safety 5%, programme coordination 20%, outreach 5%) is approximate, and the exact spread of funding depends on the needs of each proposed SPI Flagship Initiative.

Acknowledging that the ability to cover some costs for equipment and analysis can be crucial for the success of a Flagship Initiative, such costs can partially be covered by the budget. The need must be clearly justified in the proposal and the majority of the budget must go towards logistics, safety and programme coordination.

Besides the SPI Flag Initiatives, will other SPI grants (Exploratory Grant, Polar Access Grant, Technogrant) still be available in the coming years? Can these grants be combined with a SPI Flagship Initiative?

Yes, all other current SPI funding instruments will be available. Applying for another SPI grant within the framework of SPI Flagship Initiative is possible, but applicants would have to demonstrate why additional funding is necessary to complement the very substantial funding available through the SPI Flagship Initiative.