SPI Flagship Initiatives

Background

In order to complement existing funding schemes and to facilitate higher and lasting impact of the Swiss research community in international polar research, the SPI is announcing the launch of mid-term bottom-up coordinated research programmes, the SPI Flagship Initiatives (SPI-FI). The first call for proposals will open on February 1st 2021.

The SPI-FI were designed to provide targeted coordination and support of multi-disciplinary field campaigns in polar or remote high latitude regions, and open new avenues for collaboration between research groups, which would lack necessary resources and critical skill sets to undertake or support fieldwork in polar regions on their own.

Figure 1: Conceptual diagram for each SPI Flagship Initiative. Clusters represent different research discipline/topics and consist of one or possibly several research groups.
Key characteristics of SPI Flagship Initiatives

The SPI Flagship Initiatives will:

- enable innovative, high-quality research programmes that require field work in polar regions;
- enable the establishment of Swiss coordinated science programmes in polar regions;
- generate synergies (science, logistics, data) between Swiss groups of different disciplines;
- enable a mid-term science programs by providing sustainable funding (3 – 5 years horizon);
- be defined following a bottom-up approach;
- foster multi-disciplinary research;
- enable links with international initiatives and other national polar programmes;
- be complementary to project funding by e.g. SNSF or EU by concentrating SPI funding on logistics, access and other enabling measures;
- enable high common standards of data management, open science approaches, safety and public outreach.

Geographic focus

SPI-FI are expected to be organised around a strong regional focus in order to maximise scientific (multi-disciplinary) synergies and optimise logistics as well as international collaboration.

The call for proposals will be open to research in any polar or remote high-altitude region.

Involvement of Swiss researchers

All researchers affiliated to a Swiss public research institution with an interest in polar or remote high-altitude regions will be invited to prepare and submit proposals. Multi-disciplinary collaboration will be a central element of each programme. Researchers from all fields are encouraged to participate in proposals, including from fields considered as “non-typical” for polar sciences and fields which do not themselves require fieldwork but are essential in reaching the overall aim of the proposed research.

Flagships should not be approached as single research projects but as programmes bringing together and coordinating different groups and research questions with a similar regional focus. Therefore, an inclusive approach by the PI of a proposal will be a crucial success factor. Similarly, synergies and exchange with international initiatives and international research infrastructure operators in the region will be an imperative selection criterion.

International collaboration

International collaboration is fundamental to polar research and encouraged within the Flagship Initiatives. Direct funding (e.g. transport to field sites) will be reserved for scientists employed by a Swiss research institution, and it is expected that all research clusters will be Swiss led. However, as the majority of funding for each programme is envisioned to go towards logistics, international partners can 'pay their own way' and benefit from logistical and safety infrastructure provided by each programme.
**Budget**

The budget available for the SPI Flagship programme will be announced at the launch for the call for proposals on February 1st 2021.

**Budgetary structure**

As much as possible, the Flagships should be developed and defined in a bottom-up approach, thereby providing the Swiss polar science community with funding and support where they need it. The budgetary structure given below is therefore a guideline, and the exact spread of funding will be discussed and defined on a case-by-case basis during the multi-stage proposal process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provisional budgetary structure for each SPI Flagships Initiative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logistics <em>(access, transport, etc.)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety <em>(courses, field support, etc.)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme coordination <em>(incl. meetings)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach &amp; open access publication fees</td>
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<td>Opportunity fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis, Equipment</td>
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</tbody>
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**Complementary funding**

The scientific work of the Flagship components should be supported by funding instruments such as Sinergia, other SNF grants, EU or third-party funding (such as private foundations or funds from own research institutions).

**Definition process**

Flagships will be tailored to the specific research needs of the Swiss polar science community and the process of their definition is designed to be bottom-up, driven by scientists and supported by the SPI. In order to enable such a process and in parallel provide a framework that allows for continuous exchange (in terms of feasibility, scope, etc.) the call for proposals consisting of several stages.

The official launch and opening of the call for proposals of the SPI Flagship Initiatives will take place on **February 1st 2021**, at which time detailed information regarding the programme and the proposal process will become available.
Shortly after the opening of the call for proposals, the SPI will hold information events, where detailed information will be provided and potential applicants will be able to ask specific questions. The information events will be held online on February 19th 2021 and February 26th 2021.

Following the information event, the SPI will ask interested scientists to submit a pre-proposal, due in April 2021. The pre-proposal will be assessed by a group of international experts, who will provide recommendations regarding the scope and feasibility of the proposed programme. Applicants will furthermore be invited to participate in region-specific workshops, to be held summer 2021.

Full proposals will be due in October 2021 and reviewed by an international panel of experts. Results of the review process will be announced in December 2021.

11.12.2020