

Polar Access Fund Call for Proposals

Deadline for applications: 20 January 2026, 12:00 (Swiss time)

About the Polar Access Fund

The Polar Access Fund should enable young researchers (see definition below) to undertake a (first) field trip to a polar region (or a remote high-altitude area). The research conducted during the field trip must be inserted into an existing overarching project and be related to the issue of climate change.

The aim of the Polar Access Fund is to provide field access to a new generation of polar researchers, thus enabling successful applicants to gain critical experience in leading fieldwork and supporting their professional development.

The Polar Access Fund is an instrument co-funded by the SPI and the BNP Paribas Swiss Foundation.

Financial support and eligible costs

Funding of up to CHF 20'000.- can be granted per successfully evaluated proposal. The total budget allocated to Polar Access Fund call for proposals is CHF 100'000.-.

Eligible costs include all expenses related to the field trip and related fieldwork. The Polar Access Fund will not support trips without scientific background (adventure, sports, etc.) or overhead. Costs related to the participation of additional team members are eligible in exceptional cases if duly documented/justified and acting in support of the applicant's project objectives.

Overarching project and field trip

The field trip must be part of a broader already funded research project/PhD work (overarching project) at a Swiss public research institution.

The field trip can be undertaken in any polar region, Arctic or Antarctic. Field trips to remote high-altitude regions, such as the Andes or Himalaya are also eligible. The organisation and logistics of the funded field trip must be undertaken independently by the successful applicant. The SPI can give supporting documents (e.g., letter of recommendation) to successful applicants but cannot take care of visa or other such processes in their name. The SPI expects high safety and sustainability standards to be implemented during the field trip. Necessary means (field guide, equipment, etc.) can be included in the budget. The field trip must be completed within 18 months of the award of the grant. Exceptions can be granted if duly justified.

Applicants who have already been on field trips in polar regions will not be declared ineligible but should duly explain which trips have been completed and how the proposed field trip distinguishes itself from previous opportunities.



Target public and thematic areas

Any doctoral student or early post-doctoral researcher (maximum 36 months after the PhD award at the time of the proposal submission) working at a Swiss public research institution is eligible to apply.

This deadline will be handled strictly. The SPI can decide to grant exceptions and extend this period for up to 12 months for special circumstances (illness, maternity leave, etc.) if substantiated evidence is submitted. The nationality of the applicant is not an eligibility criterion.

This call is open to all disciplines interested in working in the above-mentioned regions. Interdisciplinary initiatives as well as initiatives from, e.g., Social Sciences, Humanities and Economics, are also encouraged. Proposals should underline the link of their project with issues related to climate change.

Environmental impact

In view of promoting innovative and sustainable research methods, applicants are asked to take a thoughtful approach weighing the merits of the proposed project against its environmental impact. The proposal should reflect efforts made towards a reduction of the environmental impact of the proposed field trip (e. g. means of transport, reinforced collaboration between research groups, optimized coordination and planning), while maximising its scientific output. The offset of carbon emissions should only be applied once all options to avoid and reduce emissions have been exhausted.

Eligibility

Applicants are reminded to study the eligibility rules for this call closely. Ineligible applications will not be submitted for evaluation. To be eligible, proposals must notably respect the above-mentioned call's general aims, the definition of the call's target public, eligible costs as well as geographic focus. Proposals for field trips which are not taking place in the frame of an already approved and funded research project (overarching project) will be considered ineligible.

Submission

A complete application consists of:

- A) Completed [online application form](#)
- B) Attachments to be uploaded into online application form:
 - 1) CV of the applicant, including publication list (PDF, compulsory – free format)
 - 2) Letter of support by supervisor at Swiss affiliated institution (PDF, compulsory – free format)
 - 3) Letter of support by local partner (PDF, optional – free format)
 - 4) Completed carbon emissions assessment tool (Excel, compulsory)

All application documents must be uploaded through the [online application form](#). Applications sent by email will not be accepted. Incomplete proposals will be considered ineligible.

The deadline for submission will be 20 January 2026, 12:00 (Swiss time). The online application form will be closed on the deadline date. No late applications will be accepted – no exceptions!

Should you encounter any problem in the submission process, contact: grants@swisspolar.ch. Please note however that trouble-shooting in the last minutes before the deadline cannot be guaranteed.

Evaluation

Eligible proposals submitted before the deadline will be evaluated by an external scientific evaluation panel appointed by the SPI.

The evaluation criteria will be the following:

- 1) Scientific merit of the field trip
- 2) Added-value of the field trip to the overarching research project
- 3) Potential of the applicant
- 4) Added-value of the field trip for the applicant and their career
- 5) Feasibility (methodology and logistics)

Sound efforts to maximise the scientific outputs of proposed projects while minimising their environmental footprint will also be considered during the evaluation process. This is not intended to discriminate projects and disciplines that have fewer options to minimise their environmental footprint but to stimulate reflection on the environmental impact of a proposed project and to promote sustainability in polar research.

Evaluation results will be transmitted to applicants around 3 months after the application deadline. Successful applicants will receive a grant agreement (contract) from SPI specifying the grant's conditions (reporting, payments, etc.).

Outreach

Two successful applicants per year will have the opportunity to collaborate with Swiss Polar Class (educational programme for primary schools of the SPI – www.polar-class.ch) on outreach material related to their field trip. Successful applicants will be contacted directly by Swiss Polar Class after the evaluation should their project match the outreach programme's requirements.

For any additional information or clarification, please contact: grants@swisspolar.ch.