SWISS POLAR INSTITUTE

SPI Exploratory Grants
Call for Proposals

Deadline for applications: 15 October 2026, 12:00 (Swiss time)

About the SPI Exploratory Grants

The SPI Exploratory Grants support established Swiss based scientists active in polar regions (including remote high- altitude regions such as the Andes and the Himalayas) by allowing them to launch short-term new ideas (for example pilot projects), fund additional fieldwork or launch new collaborations with financial support for logistics.

To maximise the scientific output of a project whilst minimising its environmental footprint, grants can also be used for the acquisition of polar data and samples through innovative methods. These methods can for instance involve reinforced collaboration between research groups or with other projects, enhanced cooperation with local partners, or the acquisition of remotely sensed data.

Collaboration with new teams or across disciplines are particularly encouraged, as well as participation in larger/international activities. The grants can be used to complement the funding of initiatives supported by larger funding schemes (e.g. SNSF, EU, etc.).

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 call's general aims, the definition of the call's eligible applicants and costs as well as its geographic focus.

Eligible applicants and projects

The SPI Exploratory Grants are complementary to the Polar Access Fund (specifically focused on early-career researchers) and to the SPI Technogrants (focused on technology developments). Consequently, eligibility will be limited to established researchers or post-docs (at least 3 years after PhD graduation) employed by a Swiss public research institution.

For fieldwork funding for early-career scientists, please consider the Polar Access Fund.

Researchers from all fields, also fields considered as "non-typical" for polar sciences (e.g. engineering, materials, medicine, humanities and social sciences, etc.), are encouraged to apply if they have a project to be conducted in a polar context.

Geographical focus

The SPI Exploratory Grants fund projects in polar regions, the Arctic and Antarctic, according to the SPI's focus on high latitude.

High-altitude research is an essential part of SPI and an important complementary area of interest to high-latitude poles. However, funding of fieldwork and logistics for high-altitude research will concentrate on projects contributing to comparative high-altitude studies in support of polar issues and on complex and expensive logistics for fieldwork in remote high-altitude areas such as the Andes and the Himalayas.

Acquisitions of datasets and samples must relate to the high-latitude and high-altitude regions as defined above.

Eligible costs and financial support

Funding of up to CHF 75,000.- can be granted per successfully evaluated proposal. A detailed budget will be requested from each applicant. For this year (2026), the total budget allocated to SPI Exploratory Grants is CHF 200,000.-.

Eligible costs:

- Travel costs to scientific stations/infrastructure in polar regions (including for the performance of technical/maintenance work);
- shipment of scientific equipment or material, and samples;
- purchase of small equipment (in duly justified cases) and consumables;
- rental of scientific equipment or sensing systems;
- purchase of strictly required work clothing. Such purchases must be processed through our official partners and items must contain an SPI logo (for available options, please see the dedicated webpage: https://swisspolar.ch/spi-funding-instruments/protective-clothing-gear/)
- acquisition of remotely sensed data;
- funding towards fieldwork carried out by local partners;
- costs for preliminary analysis/early processing of data/samples directly after fieldwork (max. CHF 15,000.-);
- offset of carbon emissions, if not an option already offered by the institution (see below for more details on the eligibility conditions of carbon compensation).

Non-eligible costs:

- overhead;
- costs relating to salaries of permanent positions;
- costs relating to scientific exchange (stay in another lab/research facility) and the organisation of workshops;
- initiatives which are not directly inserted into a research activity (sports, arts, adventure, outreach, …).
- initiatives taking place onboard or in context of the FOREL Research Platform. All activities and expeditions related to the Forel research platform should be applied for directly to the FOREL Heritage Association.

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 the inclusion of innovative methods for data and sample acquisition, optimised coordination and planning, enhanced collaborations with partners, and the maximisation / pooling of sampling opportunities. While some projects have a greater environmental footprint than others, efforts made by applicants to reduce it must be made explicit in submitted proposals. The offset of carbon emissions should

only be applied once all options to avoid and reduce emissions have been exhausted.

Submission

A complete application file consists of:

A) Completed online application platform (contact, main information and proposal)

B) Attachments to be uploaded into online application form as PDF:
1) Letters of support
2) CVs of the applicant and main partners, incl. publication lists as PDF (compulsory – free format, max 4 pages per person)
3) Completed carbon assessment tool

All application documents must be uploaded through the online application platform. Applications sent by email will not be accepted. Incomplete proposals will be considered ineligible.

The deadline for submission will be 15 October 2026 (12:00 noon Swiss time). The online application form will be closed on the deadline date. No late applications will be accepted and no exceptions will be made.

Should you encounter any problem in the submission process, contact: grants@swisspolar.ch. Please ensure enough time to complete the submission process as troubleshooting 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 proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Scientific merit of the proposed project;
2. Originality of the project;
3. Feasibility (scientific and logistical);
4. Experience and expertise of the PI and partners for the proposed project;
5. Added value of the requested funding.

Whilst scientific merit remains the main evaluation criterion, sound efforts to maximise scientific outputs while minimising the environmental footprint of proposed projects 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 solely 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 approximately four months after the application deadline. Successful applicants will receive a grant agreement (contract) from SPI specifying the grant's conditions (reporting, payments, etc.).

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

For more information on projects funded by SPI, including through the SPI Exploratory Grants, visit

our project database or blog for field notes.