



SWEET Call 1-2023

Questions and answers (Q&A)

Please read carefully the SWEET Call Guideline and this Q&A document.



1 Questions related to the full proposal phase

Q 1.1: Do you think that it would be possible to receive further clarifications regarding one of the reviewers' recommendations?

Answer: During the evaluation phase of SWEET calls, the SFOE is available to answer questions related to the evaluation procedure itself or application documents, but does not provide guidance on changes to the content of proposals to preserve the independence of the evaluation panel.

Q 1.2: Is the letter of intent submitted by each member in the pre-proposal stage sufficient as it is, or shall each member submit a new letter of commitment?

Answer: Please see Section 4.3.2 in the Call Guideline (and compare it to Section 4.2.2): In the pre-proposal, letters of intent had to be submitted by the members. In the full proposal, however, letters of commitment must be submitted (see Appendix B with the sections that must be included in the letters). Each member must therefore submit a new letter. Only the host institution that has already submitted an LoC in the pre-proposal can submit the same letter (assuming that there are no changes).

Q 1.3: We assume that the members of the consortium with a change in their budget will re-submit the letter of commitment. Is our assumption, right?

Answer: See answer to Q1.2: the letters must be changed from LoI to LoC either way. But yes, if further adjustments are needed, e.g. for budget, then this must be adjusted accordingly in the new letters.

Q 1.4: The call states the following: "The coordinator, the KTT expert, the integration expert, members, and WP leaders must provide a one-A4 page CV that includes...". By the formulation, we understand that there will be one CV per consortium member (i.e., the head of the group). Is our assumption right?

Answer: Yes, there needs to be one CV per consortium member. But e.g. WP leaders or the KTT expert and integration expert do not necessarily have to be the "head of the group", but a CV is also needed for these persons.

2 Questions related to the pre-proposal phase

Q 2.1: Until proposal submission, I plan to act as coordinator for our consortium (the host institution is the institution I work for). After that, I would like to transfer the coordinator role to one of the other members and take on the role as integration expert. Would this be allowed, even though the "new" coordinator is neither employed by an institution of higher education nor the host institution for our consortium?

Answer: The coordinator must be an employee of the host institution, which must be a Swiss institution of higher education, see Call Guideline, Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.4.

Q 2.2: Would it be possible to pay the delegates of relevant industry associations for delivering the insights from the consortium's activities to their members?



To do so: could we split the KTT expert role across these industry associations, or do we need to appoint a separate KTT officer who would then subcontract and coordinate with the industry associations?

In both cases: would we need to list each of the industry associations that receive money as a separate member institution, or could they also be listed as cooperation partners in one of these cases?

Answer: As specified in the Section 3.2.4 of the Call Guideline, the consortium must appoint a KTT expert who is responsible for ensuring that the outputs of the consortium are disseminated and communicated to all target groups through appropriate channels. As implied by the phrasing, the SFOE expects that the role of KTT expert is held by one person. However, as leader of the WP on KTT, the KTT expert should of course collaborate with other people, and these people may come from associations. Accordingly, the consortium may choose to involve associations in its KTT activities. As described in Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 of the Call Guideline, there are two basic options:

1. If the associations apply for SWEET funding, they are members of the consortium and therefore may impact the core budget, see Section 3.4.1.
2. If they do not apply for SWEET funding but finance their activities from own and/or third-party contributions, they are cooperation partners.

Another option would be to subcontract the associations for their KTT activities. However, subcontracting comes with restrictions:

- A subcontractor's contributions to the work programme must be clearly defined, limited in scope, and clearly lie outside the fields of expertise of consortium members and cooperation partners. Accordingly, the pre-proposal and full proposal must explain why a subcontractor's contributions cannot be provided by consortium members and cooperation partners.
- The SFOE will closely scrutinize the pre-proposal and full proposal as well as the consortium's scientific and financial reporting to ensure that subcontracting is not used to circumvent the link between the core budget and the consortium members, see Section 3.4.1.
- Subcontracts include VAT.

In the pre-proposal, the KTT activities of are described in Sections 3.2 and 5. The consortium is expected to explain its reasoning behind the possible involvement of associations and to justify possible subcontracts.

Q 2.3: Section 3.4 encourages additional own and third-party contributions. However, this is not mentioned as an evaluation criterion in the evaluation section 5. Would a proposal with (in extreme case) zero own- and third-party funding have the same chances as a proposal with substantial own- or third-party funding, as long as it can convince external reviewers that the consortium is “likely to attain the expected outcomes and outputs” (Criterion 3.a) and that the “resources assigned to WPs are in line with their objectives and deliverables” (Criterion 4.a)? Or is there a minimum amount of own and third-party contributions, or any other way how additional own and third-party funding would increase chances of a proposal, apart from its influence on the evaluation criteria in section 5?

Answer: At present, SWEET does not require own and third-party contributions to exceed specified thresholds and therefore there is no evaluation criterion that assesses these contributions relative to the SWEET funding.

Nevertheless, as made clear by the first two sentences in Section 3.4 of the Call Guideline, there is an implicit expectation that members and cooperation partners contribute also: “The SFOE



funds in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity: To ensure that the overall funding is sufficient for the work programme of the consortium, members and cooperation partners supplement the requested SWEET funding, each according to its abilities, with own and third-party contributions”.

While the SFOE does not task the evaluation panel with assessing own and third-party contributions, the panel may nevertheless consider them as an aspect of criteria 2a and 2b. These criteria address the consortium composition and how it enables an inter-/transdisciplinary approach as well as the consortium compactness and how it is reflected in complementary and significant contributions of each member and its share of the core budget. For instance, if the evaluation panel believes that the contributions of a particular member are significant but that they cannot be covered by that member’s share of the core budget, the panel may take a look at that member’s own and third-party contributions. If these are deemed to be too low, the panel may doubt that member’s commitment or judge that there is a substantial risk of that member not delivering its contributions.

Q 2.4: Would members be allowed to declare as third-party contribution a) the revenues achieved in or b) cost of the staff working on consulting projects with a similar content?

Could this include c) revenues / cost incurred in the past, or only d) revenues / cost which were incurred during the proposed SWEET project?

Answer: Section 3.4 of the Call Guideline states that:

- Own contributions are financial contributions (cash or in-kind) from members and cooperation partners.
- Third-party contributions are financial contributions (cash or in-kind) from sources other than members, cooperation partners, and the Federal Administration (e.g., Federal Offices, Innosuisse, and the Swiss National Science Foundation).¹

There is some room for interpretation between the two types of contributions. As the SFOE does not at present require own and third-party contributions to exceed specified thresholds (see the answer to Q 2.3), the distinctions between the contributions are not of primary importance.

The cost of staff working on consulting projects is eligible provided that:

1. The activities and their expected results are described in the SWEET proposal.
2. The results of the activities are described in the annual reports.
3. The cost is included in the budget as well as the annual financial reports, and the same amount is declared as a third-party contribution.

Costs incurred before the start date specified in the subsidy contract are not eligible, see Section 3.4.4 in the Call Guideline.

Revenues from past consulting projects by members or cooperation partners and revenues from consulting activities that are not described in the SWEET proposal are classified as own contributions.

Q 2.5: Some of our partners work on many related projects funded by the Federal Administration (such as SWEET, SNF and consulting projects). Where and how can / should the funding they receive from [these] sources be declared in the proposal? Or should these projects

¹ Contributions from cooperation partners should be declared by them as own contributions and not by members as third-party contributions.



simply be mentioned as references (without financial detail) to illustrate the credibility of the consortium?

Answer: Related projects must not be included in the budget. In the pre-proposal related projects funded by the Federal Administration may be listed as references in the text. In the full proposal a section is dedicated to the listing of these projects.

Q 2.6: So far, our institution does not trace for which projects the personnel hours of our administrative staff were used, as such a detailed reporting would further increase overhead costs. However, according to table 3-4, internal (overhead) costs for administrative personnel may only be reported as “own contribution” by “multiplying the personnel hours by the specified hourly rates”.

Does this mean, that our overhead costs can only be declared as own contributions if the corresponding administrative staff start to book these hours on the SWEET project in our internal SAP system? Or could we:

- a. declare the difference between our standard external rates and the maximum rates from Appendix II of the SFOE Directive as own contribution, or
- b. provide an internal estimate of the personnel hours and hourly rates of administrative staff that were incurred as result of the SWEET project, even if these personnel hours have not booked on the SWEET project in our SAP system?

Answer: It is sufficient to declare an estimate of the overhead for administrative personnel costs, there is no need to book these hours on the SWEET project in the institution’s SAP system.

Q 2.7: According to Table 3-1, “Enterprises associated with the Swiss confederation” are eligible for SWEET funding, while “Federal departments” are not. Can you provide some examples for what is meant by “enterprises associated with the Swiss confederation”? Would all of the “Federal authorities” that are listed in the first paragraph of section 2.1.4 be ineligible for SWEET funding, even if some of them are no[t] federal departments?

Could federal authorities or federal departments collaborating with the consortium be explicitly listed as cooperation partners?

Answer: “Enterprises associated with the Swiss confederation” include, e.g., Swisscom AG, SBB AG, and Schweizerische Post AG. A complete list of such enterprises can be found in Appendix 3 of the Government and Administrative Organisation Ordinance.² The contributions of such an enterprise to a consortium’s work programme must not be part of the enterprise’s mandate and financing the enterprise’s contributions with SWEET funding must not violate Article 6 of the Federal Subsidy Act.³ The SFOE should be consulted as early as possible if there are any doubts about the eligibility of an enterprise associated with the Swiss confederation to receive SWEET funding.

Table 3-1 mentions “Federal department and its administrative units” and therefore includes Federal Offices. Therefore, neither Federal Offices nor units associated with them – such as the National Cyber Security Centre – can receive SWEET funding. In addition, federal commissions such as the Federal Electricity Commission may not receive SWEET funding.

Since SWEET Call 1-2023 is a joint activity of the SFOE and NCCS, basic compliance considerations mean that the NCCS cannot participate in a consortium’s activities – either as a member or cooperation partner.

² Government and Administrative Organisation Ordinance (SR 172.010.1)

³ Federal Subsidy Act (SR 616.1)



The phrase “close collaboration with relevant federal authorities ... is strongly encouraged” should not be interpreted to mean that such authorities should be enlisted as members or cooperation partners, but simply that the consortium, during its implementation phase, closely interacts with such authorities to increase the relevance and therefore the impact of its work programme. For the same reason, the SFOE and NCCS intend to populate the monitoring panel with experts from relevant federal authorities.

Q 2.8: Treatment of PnD Project Partners: Would the (academic and / or industry) partners in PnD projects also be counted towards the number “N” of members in section 3.4.1 [of the Call Guideline]?

Answer: Partners in P+D projects only do not receive SWEET funding; they are therefore not members of the consortium and have no influence on the core budget.

Q 2.9: Collaboration with federal authorities: The call strongly encourages close collaboration with relevant federal authorities. However, some of the federal authorities told us, that the resources for the type of collaboration which we were planning would need to be requested by the SFOE. Additional discussions to clarify the magnitude of the required resources were refused to avoid creating unfair competition with other consortia.

Can the SFOE comment about the likelihood of requesting such resources:

- a) In reply to this email (that would be ideal), or
- b) As part of the pre-proposal review process? (that would also be feasible)

How may we proceed with the discussions to clarify the amount of required resources:

- a) Should we include a rough plan for the intended cooperation in the proposal, based on publicly available information (without further discussions with the federal authorities)?
- b) Do you allow us to enter into more detailed private discussions with the respective federal authorities (this would be our preferred option, to avoid revealing ideas regarding our work plan to other consortia)?
- c) Would we be obliged to enter into a public discussion with the respective authority, the results of which would be published on the SWEET Program website (in this case we may wait with discussions until after the pre-proposal phase)?

Answer: A collaboration planned by a consortium will not be requested by the SFOE. As stated in the reply to Q2.7, the phrase “close collaboration” should not be interpreted as the SFOE requiring SWEET consortia to add Federal Offices as members or cooperation partners. As stated in the same reply, Federal Offices cannot receive SWEET funding. The SWEET Office will not provide funding to another Federal Office, especially not to fund a collaboration that a consortium may be planning.

Consortia should not contact Federal Offices and their administrative units about collaborations during the application and evaluation phase.

Q 2.10: Are we allowed to interact at all with any of the federal authorities during the (pre-)proposal phase? (if so, with which of them, through which channels, and regarding what types of questions?)

For example: could we already during the proposal phase ask members of (at least some?) relevant federal authorities to:



- a) specify what research topics & questions would be most relevant for them?
- b) provide feedback on our draft consortium work-plan?

Or will this type of feedback be collected by SFOE as part of the normal review process

Answer: As stated in the answer to Q2.9, consortia should not contact Federal Offices and their administrative units about collaborations during the application and evaluation phase. In addition, note that the pre- and full proposals will be evaluated by a panel of external experts, i.e., without any involvement of personnel from federal offices, according to the criteria presented in Table 5-2 of the Call Guideline. Whether your research topics or questions were contributed by or relevant to federal offices is not addressed by any of the evaluation criteria and will therefore not influence the evaluation. Finally, note that the research questions in Section 2 of the Call Guideline were formulated by the SFOE, the NCCS, and the FOCP. You are encouraged to focus on formulating a work programme that answers these questions rather than contacting other federal offices to get research questions that might be relevant to them.

Q 2.11: According to the call section 4.3.4 “The coordinator, the KTT expert, the integration expert, members, and WP leaders must provide a one-A4 page CV” latest at the full proposal stage.

If we intend to assign one of these roles to a person, that should be hired after the funding decision, should we

- a) Specify this in the proposal, or announce it after the funding decision?
- b) Submit the CV of an i) existing employee (even though we intend to pass on the responsibility) ii) a potential external candidate (subject to his/her agreement) iii) submit no CV

Answer: Your phrasing “If we intend to assign one of these roles to a person” suggests that you may be thinking about assigning the roles to one person. If so, note that you may not assign the three roles to one person as stated in Section 3.2.4 of the Call Guideline: “The SFOE expects the coordinator and the KTT and integration experts to collaborate closely. [...] Because the profiles of the three positions are very different, the consortium must fill them with separate persons.”

Furthermore, note that at the full-proposal stage, as stated in Section 4.3.4 of the Call Guideline, “The coordinator, the KTT expert, the integration expert, members, and WP leaders must provide a one-A4 page CV [...]”. Thus, the persons filling the key positions must be known prior to the submission of the full proposal and not only after the funding decision. Eligibility criterion E5 was amended to make clear that it is only enforced at the full-proposal stage, see the updated Call Guideline.

Finally, the importance that the SFOE attaches to the key positions means that appointing a person provisionally, i.e., solely to satisfy the eligibility criterion E5 at the full-proposal stage, and then appointing another person after the funding decision, will not be viewed favourably by the SFOE. Such a change would also contradict the SFOE’s expectation that the consortium that prepared the full proposal will implement the work programme as specified in the full proposal. While it is clear that there may be changes in the key positions over the consortium duration, the consortia are expected to appoint people that intend to fill the positions for at least a considerable fraction of the duration.

Q 2.12: As required by the call guidelines, we will submit the CVs of the 3 persons who will fill the key roles latest with the full proposals. Do these persons need to be employed by a member entity at the time of submitting the proposal? Or could they also



a) be employed in another department of a member institution and commit to shifting to the department which is a member entity when the contract is awarded?

b) be employed at a non-member organisation and commit to start working at a member entity if the contract is awarded?

Answer: The call guideline states in Section 3.2.1 that the host institution is obliged to appoint one of its employees as the consortium coordinator. By definition, the host institution is a member institution, so the coordinator will be affiliated with an entity of the host institution and therefore with a member entity. Furthermore, Section 3.2.4 of the call guideline states that the coordinator is responsible for the preparation and submission of the pre-proposal and the full proposal. It follows that the coordinator must be employed by the host institution when the pre-proposal and the full proposal are submitted.

The call guideline contains no analogous statements about the KTT and integration experts, so they may be members (or part of a member entity), cooperation partners, or subcontractors. In any case, the affiliation of the KTT and integration experts must be accurately declared at the time of submitting a pre-proposal or a full proposal. Whether or not they plan to join a member entity in the case of an award is less important than their expertise and contributions to the work programme.

It is unclear to us why there is a concern about the key positions being filled by people that are employed by a member entity. The reason is that member entities play a less important role in the proposals or the consortia than member institutions or members. The former must fulfil the criteria set out in Section 3.3, and the latter influence the core budget as described in Section 3.4.1. Although the number of member entities is not irrelevant because each member must be part of a member entity, cooperation partners or subcontractors joining a member entity in the case of an award would only impact the core budget if they become members.

Q 2.13: Would it be possible to obtain (non-confidential versions) of the proposal or work-plan from relevant existing SWEET consortia? (to improve alignment of work-plans and avoid duplication)

Answer: The SFOE cannot share proposals or work programmes that were prepared by consortia. You are welcome to ask the consortia if they are prepared to share their proposals or work plans with you. See [Overview of ongoing consortia \(admin.ch\)](#) for links to the webpages of the consortia.

Q 2.14: There are multiple research groups from the host institution within the consortium. Does each of these groups need to submit a “letter of intent”, signed by the head of the group, or would it be sufficient to submit the “letter of commitment” by the host institution, signed by the board, itemizing each group with their roles and the budgets (i.e., requested from SFOE, own, etc.)?

Answer: Each member entity must submit a separate letter with the mandatory sections from Appendix B (see Call Guideline). In addition, there must be a separate LoC from the host institution (see Call Guideline, section 4.2.2).

Q 2.15: Do we interpret it right that BAFU can be a cooperation partner in our consortium?

Answer: Yes, the FOEN can theoretically be a cooperation partner. But as stated in the reply to Q2.9, "Consortia should not contact Federal Offices and their administrative units about collaborations during the application and evaluation phase". Therefore, the FOEN can only become a cooperation partner at a later stage.



Q 2.16: Are FMV or SIG considered an industry or private partner?

Answer: Yes, companies such as SIG or FMV are counted as part of the private sector in this SWEET call for proposals, since a) they have their own legal personality, b) they are not subject to a general authority from the public sector and c) they are free to carry out their activities in compliance with the special legal provisions.

Q 2.17: Does “Swiss National Bank” count as a “federal office” or is it OK for SNB to be a cooperation partner in the pre-proposal?

Answer: The SNB is not a federal office and can therefore be a cooperation partner in the pre-proposal.