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Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications DETEC

Swiss Federal Office of Energy SFOE
Energy Research and Cleantech

SOUR Call 1-2026: Call Guideline

Supply Security on the Path to a Net-Zero Energy System

The call for proposals closes on 1 December 2026 at 12:00 noon CEST.

sour sweet outside-the-box rethinking

Dates associated with this call

Entries in italics are provisional and will be fixed later.

Event	Date and time
Deadline for questions about this call	16 October 2026 at 12:00 noon CEST
Deadline for submissions	1 December 2026 at 12:00 noon CEST
Announcement of funding decision	*February 2027*
Teams start research	*April 2027*

Documents associated with this call

1. This call guideline
2. The proposal template

Key persons for this call

Call director: Prof. em. Marco Mazzotti
Commercialisation expert: Prof. Raphael Boemelburg

Questions about this call

Any and all questions about this call must only be directed to:

Swiss Federal Office of Energy
SWEET Office
Section Energy Research and Cleantech
P.O. Box
CH-3003 Berne / Switzerland
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The questions and answers will be published on the SWEET website and regularly updated.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 The SWEET funding programme

SWEET (SWiss Energy research for the Energy Transition) is a funding programme owned and managed by the Swiss Federal Office of Energy (SFOE). The purpose of SWEET is to fund solution-oriented research and innovation activities with a focus on the targets of Switzerland's Energy Strategy 2050 and long-term climate strategy.

The SWEET programme comprises two main funding instruments. The first is the SWEET instrument, through which seven calls for proposals were published from 2020 to 2024 that resulted in ten consortia. The second instrument is called SWEETER (SWiss research for the EnErgy Transition and Emissions Reduction) to reflect the further development of SWEET and the collaboration with the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) and through which the first call for proposals was published in April 2026.

In addition, the SWEET programme contains a third instrument called SOUR (SWEET OUtside-the-box Rethinking), which was created to explore unconventional and alternative approaches and to identify potential game changers. The first call for proposals was published in 2021 and resulted in four projects. This call guideline is associated with the second SOUR call. It is critical to note that SOUR has undergone important changes between the first and the second call. These changes are described in the next subsection.

1.2 The SOUR funding instrument

1.2.1 Background

In a broader sense, exploring unconventional and alternative approaches and identifying potential game changers may be viewed as the overarching goal of what is now often referred to as "the ARPA model." Named after the Advanced Research Projects Agency founded in the United States in 1958, later called the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the ARPA model can be characterised as follows:

1. Identifying and filling "white spaces": White spaces are gaps in funding programmes provided by the public and private sectors and in capabilities just beyond the frontier of what is currently technically possible.[1] An example of the first gap is the so-called "valley of death" between the development of a technology and its successful commercialisation. Both gaps are associated with high risks and high potential rewards.
2. Orienting funding programmes around missions: To fill the white spaces, funding programmes are oriented around missions and emphasise the acceleration of transformational technological advances.[2]
3. Orienting projects around quantifiable milestones: To increase the likelihood that such funding programmes result in the expected advances, they support projects that are oriented not just around objectives, but around quantifiable milestones.
4. Empowering programme managers within lean structures: Highly qualified programme managers from academia or the private and public sectors join the funding agency for the duration of the funding programme. They are embedded in lean structures and empowered to propose missions, select projects for funding, monitor funded projects closely, and stop projects that miss milestones.

[1] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017). An Assessment of ARPA-E. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

[2] Mission-oriented funding programmes can be characterised as funding programmes that support research and innovation activities in order to reach well-defined and time-bound technological and/or societal goals.

Given DARPA's successes, the ARPA model has been adopted and adapted in the United States by HSARPA (Department of Homeland Security, since 2002), IARPA (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, since 2006), ARPA-E (Department of Energy, since 2009), ARPA-I (Department of Transportation, since 2021), and ARPA-H (National Institutes of Health, since 2022). An evaluation of ARPA-E, while acknowledging that insufficient time had elapsed for "observable evidence of widespread deployment of funded technologies," noted that various technologies had obtained follow-on funding and were "beginning to enter the commercial market."[1] The role of the programme manager has received particular attention.[1,3]

Because of the ARPA model's promise, it is being explored by several European organisations: SPRIND[4] (Germany, since 2019), Wellcome Leap[5] (United Kingdom/USA, since 2020), ARIA[6] (United Kingdom, since 2023), and the Advanced Innovation Challenges Pilot[7] (European Innovation Council, since 2026). The ARPA model was also covered by the Swiss Science Council (SSC) in its 2023 report on Mission-Oriented Research and Innovation in Switzerland. The SSC recommended that an ARPA-pilot project be launched in Switzerland. This SOUR call is such a pilot, with the following goals:

1. To test key features of the ARPA model in the Swiss context.
2. To support projects that have the potential to produce transformative solutions. (The meaning of "transformative solution" is explained in the next subsection.)
3. To assist the further development of the SOUR instrument and the SWEET programme.

Within SOUR, the programme manager is referred to as the "call director." For the pilot, the call director is Prof. em. Marco Mazzotti (formerly at ETH Zurich). If the pilot is judged a success, further SOUR calls based on the ARPA model may be issued, for which it is planned that the director is selected through a dedicated call.

1.2.2 Important characteristics

Persons interested in applying for funding in response to this call should be aware of the following important characteristics.

Projects must have the potential to produce transformative solutions

In the context of this call, a transformative solution is not simply any technology, but a technology that meets three criteria:

1. It is developed for a specific use and thereby contributes substantially to meeting the targets of the Energy Strategy 2050 and long-term climate strategy.
2. It is developed with commercialisation in mind from the outset: Alongside the development of the technology, projects develop a viable business model for bringing the technology to market (i.e., who sells it, who buys it, at what price and cost, in which markets).
3. If developed successfully, it would represent a major leap compared to solutions currently available on the market or being incrementally refined. The major leap should result in a new learning curve with a fundamentally improved cost-performance trade-off and thereby increase the likelihood that the solution can establish itself in the marketplace.

It is critical to note that this call is not designed to support incremental refinements. For instance, a proposal to raise the conversion efficiency of a mature photovoltaic cell architecture by a small margin

[3] Azoulay P., E. Fuchs, A. P. Goldstein, and M. Kearney (2019). *Funding Breakthrough Research: Promises and Challenges of the ARPA Model*. Innovation Policy and the Economy, 19:69-96.
[4] www.sprind.org/en
[5] https://wellcomeleap.org/
[6] https://aria.org.uk/
[7] https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/advanced-innovation-challenges-pilot_en

through process optimization is incremental. By contrast, a proposal to demonstrate a novel absorber material that could surpass the theoretical efficiency limits of that architecture is the kind of major leap this call exists to support. Since such leaps are more likely to be made by small teams,[8,9,10] the SFOE expects that applicants avoid the formation of large teams in response to this call.

The range of technology development supported by this call is characterised by technology readiness levels (TRL) 3 or 4 at the beginning of the project and at least 6 at the end of the project:[11]

- TRL 3 – Analytical and experimental verification of the key functions, or demonstration of the characteristic design concept: Active research and development is being launched. This includes analytical studies and laboratory tests to provide concrete evidence for the analytical predictions regarding the individual components. The supporting documentation includes the results of laboratory tests used to measure relevant parameters, as well as a comparison with the analytical predictions for key subsystems. With TRL 3, the work moves beyond the drawing board and enters the experimental phase, during which it is verified whether the concept functions as expected. The system components are validated without being integrated into an overall system. Modelling and simulation may be used to supplement the practical experiments.
- TRL 4 – Validation of the components or the system in a laboratory setting: The underlying components are integrated into a system to ensure that they function together. This achieves a relatively low-fidelity representation of the target system. This includes, for example, components built in-house in the laboratory and small-scale tests. The available supporting documentation includes the results of the integrated experiments and estimates of the existing deviations between the experimental components and results and the expected performance targets. TRL 4 to 6 represent the transition from scientific research to engineering development work. TRL 4 is the first step towards functional testing of the individual components within the overall system. The laboratory system usually consists of existing elements and a small number of specially developed components. The latter require specific machining, calibration, and arrangement.
- TRL 6 – Validation of a similar engineering and pilot system (prototype) in a relevant environment: The engineering models and prototypes are tested in a relevant environment. This is an important step towards demonstrating technological maturity. The supporting documentation provided includes the test results from the engineering tests and an analysis of the differences between the engineering system and the prototype system or environment. Furthermore, the interpretative analysis of the experimental results in relation to the target system or environment is a key component. From TRL 6 onwards, the actual engineering development work on the technology begins, leading to an operational system. The main difference between TRL 5 and 6 lies in the transition from laboratory testing to the engineering model, as well as in the definition of the dimensional ratios intended to enable the scaling of the target system. The prototype should be capable of performing all the functions planned for the target system. The test environment should correspond as closely as possible to the target environment.
- TRL 7 – Demonstration of a similar full-scale prototype system in a relevant environment: There is a significant gap between TRL 6 and 7, as a prototype now exists that is being demonstrated in a relevant environment. This includes, for example, full-scale prototypes that are being tested in the field. The available supporting documentation includes the test results from the field trials

[8] Wu L., D. Wang, and J. A. Evans (2019). *Large teams develop and small teams disrupt science and technology*. Nature, 566:378-382.

[9] Azoulay P. (2019). *Small-team science is beautiful*. Nature, 566:330-332.

[10] Xu F., L. Wu, and J. Evans (2022). *Flat teams drive scientific innovation*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 119(23):e2200927119

[11] The interpretation of the TRLs used by this call follows Appendix I in the SFOE's Directive on the submission and evaluation of applications for financial support of energy research, pilot and demonstration projects and authorization of sandbox projects, dated 19 December 2024.

and the analysis of the differences between the test and target environments, as well as the interpretation of these results in terms of their significance for the target system. The final design has thus practically been finalised.

Technologies that have already progressed beyond TRL 4 are not eligible for funding through this call.

Projects must target commercialisation from the outset

The purpose of this call is not merely to make progress toward the targets of the energy and climate strategies, but to make meaningful contributions to reaching their targets. This requires not just the development of technologies, but also their commercial adoption, which is why this call is structured to maximise the likelihood that successful projects achieve, at their end, the maturity necessary for commercial follow-on investment from early-stage venture capital or licensing partnerships with established firms.

A project that is ready for early-stage follow-on investment will generally have to demonstrate that its solution *can* matter at scale: early technical validation is in hand, achieving at least TRL 6, a credible path to producing and delivering the solution at a cost that is lower than customers are willing to pay is evident, and there are initial demand signals, whether through formal expressions of interest from potential customers or simply a value proposition so evident that the need requires no further argument. Stronger projects will go further, showing that commercial viability is not merely possible but *probable*: demonstrations at relevant scale with real performance data, commercial traction through paid pilots or partnership agreements, and economics trending toward a competitive target. Across both levels of ambition, potential investors and partners will in addition look for credible evidence that the climate impact is quantifiable, that financial and IP structures are sound, and that the practicalities of market entry (certifications, procurement requirements, channel partnerships) have been identified and are being addressed.

The transformative nature of a solution is not only important for its contribution to the Energy Strategy 2050 and the long-term climate strategy; it is also central to its prospects for follow-on investment. New ventures are inherently risky and only around half of newly established Swiss firms remain active after five years, while returns from innovation and venture investment are highly skewed: A small number of outsized successes must therefore compensate for many failures.[12,13,14] Investors will therefore look beyond a credible path to viability for the potential to become an exceptional commercial success. A solution that opens a new learning curve and fundamentally shifts the cost-performance frontier offers precisely this upside, creating scope for rapid adoption, defensible growth, and returns commensurate with the risks of commercialisation.

The expectation is that the solutions developed through this call build on this early-stage follow-on investment and thereby establish an early-adopter foothold in their addressable market in Switzerland by 2035 and, crossing into the early and late majority,[15] reach widespread, mainstream deployment by 2050 at the latest, so as to contribute substantially to the targets of the energy and climate strategies.

Consequently, projects that receive funding are expected to systematically build the evidence base that a future investor or partner would need to commit capital or resources. Research on the commercialisation of radical innovations has consistently shown that novel technologies often fail not because the technology does not work, but because commercial questions are deferred until after the technical work

[12] For instance, 54.6% of the companies in the industry and energy sector that were founded in 2018 were still operational in 2023, see Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2025), Business Demography 2023 and the associated press release.
[13] Scherer F. M. and D. Harhoff (2000). *Technology Policy for a World of Skew-Distributed Outcomes*. Research Policy, *29(4-5):559-566*.
[14] Kerr W. R., R. Nanda, and M. Rhodes-Kropf (2014). *Entrepreneurship as Experimentation*. Journal of Economic Perspectives, 28(3):25-48.
[15] Rogers E.M. (2003). Diffusion of Innovations, 5th ed., New York: Free Press.

is done.[16,17,18,19,20,21] The projects that succeed treat market exploration and technical development as co-evolving activities from the earliest stages and use iterative experimentation to reduce uncertainty about both simultaneously by incorporating feedback from early users and stakeholders.[22]

Projects will be supported by commercialisation experts

Applicants are expected to present a credible initial commercial hypothesis in their proposals and to allocate sufficient resources to advancing the hypothesis alongside the technical work during the funding period. The SFOE will provide support to funded projects through commercialisation experts in the form of training and mentoring workshops. Representatives from funded projects are expected to participate in these workshops and consider the suggestions by the experts.

Projects will be closely monitored by the call director and the SFOE

In line with the ARPA model, the call director will be empowered by the SFOE to select projects for funding, monitor funded projects closely, and in particular to terminate projects that miss their milestones to a degree that calls into question their path to commercialisation. The close monitoring aims to ensure that projects make progress with the development of potentially transformative solutions and their commercialisation. The call director will be supported by SFOE experts and a sounding board of commercialisation experts.

1.3 This SOUR call

1.3.1 Guiding theme

Broadly speaking, this call corresponds to what ARPA-E refers to as an "open funding opportunity announcement (FOA)." Such announcements solicit proposals for technologies that fall into a range of broad categories, in contrast to what are termed "focused FOAs," which solicit proposals for technologies that fall into a narrow category. Open FOAs, which account for roughly one third of all FOAs and are published about every three years,[23] are meant to ensure that ARPA-E does not miss innovative ideas that fall outside the scope of focused FOAs. ARPA-E's first FOA was an open one, which contributed to SFOE's decision to dedicate this SOUR call to a broad guiding theme, which may be viewed as the equivalent of ARPA-E's categories. Following a suggestion by the call director, the SFOE set the guiding theme of this call as "Supply Security on the Path to a Net-Zero Energy System."

Supply security means that consumers are able to procure the desired quantity of energy at all times at the necessary level of quality and at affordable prices. It also means that power plants in Switzerland and elsewhere, as well as the available supply and distribution networks, are able to meet demand at all times. Key contributors to supply security are ensuring a diverse energy supply and limiting high levels of dependence on foreign sources. (Avoiding foreign sources entirely, i.e., energy self-sufficiency, is not a goal of the Energy Strategy 2050.) Ensuring supply security during the transition to a net-zero

[16] Foss N. J. and T. Saebi (2017). *Fifteen years of research on business model innovation: How far have we come, and where should we go?* Journal of Management, 43(1):200–227.
[17] Teece D. J. (2018). *Business models and dynamic capabilities*. Long Range Planning, 51(1):40–49.
[18] Chiesa V. and F. Frattini (2011). *Commercializing technological innovation: Learning from failures in high-tech markets*. Journal of Product Innovation Management, 28(4):437–454.
[19] Chesbrough H. and R. S. Rosenbloom (2002). *The role of the business model in capturing value from innovation: Evidence from Xerox Corporation's technology spin-off companies*. Industrial and Corporate Change, 11(3):529–555.
[20] Teece D. J. (1986). *Profiting from technological innovation: Implications for integration, collaboration, licensing and public policy*. Research Policy, 15(6):285–305.
[21] Datta A., R. Reed, and L. Jessup (2015). *Commercialization of innovations: An overarching framework and research agenda*. R&D Management, 45(3):215–234.
[22] Cubero J. N., S. A. Gbadegeshin, and C. Consolación (2021). *Commercialization of disruptive innovations: Literature review and proposal for a process framework*. International Journal of Innovation Studies, 5(3):127–144.
[23] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017). An Assessment of ARPA-E. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press (pp. 36 and 75).

energy system, as targeted by Switzerland's Energy Strategy 2050 and long-term climate strategy, represents a particular challenge. To meet the challenge, it is necessary to increase the domestic (decentralised and centralised) production of renewable energy, facilitate its integration into the energy system, and reduce the consumption of final energy. Both efficiency and sufficiency measures can contribute to reducing energy consumption.

To increase the likelihood that proposals submitted in response to this call have the potential to produce transformative solutions as defined in Section 1.2.2 – and therefore contribute substantially to meeting the targets of the Energy Strategy 2050 and long-term climate strategy – proposals must address at least one of the indicators in Section 2. These indicators represent a subset of the indicators from the monitoring of the Energy Strategy 2050[24] that are relevant to the guiding theme. In addition, proposals must state the difference (the so-called "delta") they aim to make with their solution for the selected indicator(s).

1.3.2 Funding and duration

The total funding for this call is CHF 4 Mio., with which at most 4 projects will be supported. Applicants may request up to CHF 1.33 Mio.

Projects may run for a duration of at most 3 years (36 months) from the date when the subsidy contracts are issued. The expected starting date is April 2027.

Because the ARPA-model is new to Switzerland, it is critical that applicants pay close attention to the preceding characteristics before preparing a proposal in response to this call. The scientific quality of proposals is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. A project that will produce valuable scientific knowledge but does not target a major leap with a credible path to market does not fit this call and should be submitted to other funding programmes. Similarly, a project aiming to refine mature technologies to achieve product-market fit for a given commercial use case does not fit this call either. The SFOE specifically seeks to support projects whose combination of high risk and high commercial potential falls outside the scope of conventional funding, i.e., projects that have no other natural "home."

[24] The monitoring of the Energy Strategy 2050 assesses the strategy's progress towards its targets in terms of seven thematic areas and 44 indicators. The legal basis for the monitoring is given by Art. 55 of the Energy Act of 30 September 2016. The results of the monitoring are published in yearly reports (in condensed and full versions) and used every five years by the Federal Council to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures in the Energy Act.

2 Indicators

This call focuses on a selection of indicators from the monitoring of the Energy Strategy 2050 that are relevant to the guiding theme “Supply Security on the Path to a Net-Zero Energy System”, see Table 2-1.

Table 2-1: Selected indicators from the monitoring of the Energy Strategy 2050 for which funding is available through this call.

Topic area	No.	Indicator	Section in monitoring report	Related targets (at time of call publication)
Energy consumption and production	1	Final energy consumption per person and year	3.1.1	“According to the Federal Act on a Secure Electricity Supply from Renewable Energy Sources, which took effect on January 1, 2025, the target reduction in final energy consumption per person compared to the base year 2000 is 43 percent by 2035” (from monitoring report)
	2	Electricity consumption per person and year	3.1.2	“According to the Federal Act on a Secure Electricity Supply from Renewable Energy Sources, the target reduction in per capita electricity consumption compared to the base year 2000 is 13 percent by 2035.” (from monitoring report)
	3	Electricity production by renewable energy (excluding hydropower)	3.1.3	“According to the Federal Act on a Secure Electricity Supply from Renewable Energy Sources, the target for 2035 is 35,000 GWh. To achieve this, an average net increase of 2,427 GWh per year is required” (from monitoring report)
	4	Electricity production by hydropower	3.1.4	“According to the target set in the Energy Act, average production in 2035 is expected to reach 37,900 GWh.” (from monitoring report)
CO_2 emissions	5	Energy-related CO_2 emissions per person per year	7.1	No direct target, but an indirect target follows from the long-term climate strategy and the Energy Perspectives 2050+: «In a net-zero world, where all avoidable emissions must be eliminated by 2050, the Energy Perspectives 2050+ estimates that energy-related CO2 emissions will still amount to around 0.4 tons per person. … In 2023, domestic per capita emissions stood at around 3.4 tons …” (from monitoring report)
	6	Energy-related CO_2 emissions overall and by sector	7.2	Targets follow from Climate and Innovation Act, federal strategies, and CO2 law, see Table 2-2.

Table 2-2: Overview of GHG emissions in 1990 and 2021[25], the reduction pathways stipulated by the Climate and Innovation Act for the building, transport, and industry sectors (green), the reduction stated in the long-term climate strategy and the climate strategy agriculture and nutrition[26] for the agriculture sector (blue), and the reduction pathway in the CO_2 law (red)[27]. The figures given for the transport sector exclude the emissions of international aviation and shipping. The net-zero target in 2050 includes the emissions of international aviation and shipping if the fuels were tanked in Switzerland.

Sector	GHG emissions (Mt CO_2eq)		Minimum reduction (relative to 1990)					
	1990	2021	Average 2021-2030	By 2030	Average 2031-2040	By 2040	Average 2041-2050	By 2050
Building	16.68	11.65				82%		100%
Transport	18.06	16.22				57%		100%
Industry	13.84	12.09				50%		90%
Agriculture	7.63	6.49						40%
All	55.34	45.25	35%	50%	64%	75%	89%	Net-zero

[25] Federal Office for the Environment, *Switzerland's Greenhouse Gas Inventory 1990-2021*, Submission 2023, see https://www.bafu.admin.ch/en/previous-ghg-inventory

[26] Federal Office for Agriculture, Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office, and Federal Office for the Environment (2025), Agriculture and Food Climate Strategy 2050

[27] https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/fga/2022/2652/de

3 Application

Applications for SOUR funding proceed through a single proposal and require the formation of a team, a work programme, and a budget. The following sections describe the requirements that teams, work programmes, and budgets must satisfy.

3.1 Team requirements

A team is led by one Principal Investigator (PI) and may contain one or more Co-PIs. Because SOUR funding is intended for small teams, the team size should be conducive to producing a major leap and enters into the evaluation, see Section 5.2.2. The PI and Co-PIs must be employees of a Swiss institution of higher education, a Swiss private-sector company, or a Swiss non-commercial research organisation.

3.2 Funding requirements

Applicants are encouraged but not required to contribute own or third-party contributions, which are defined as:

- Own contributions are financial contributions (cash or in-kind) from applicants.
- Third-party contributions are financial contributions (cash or in-kind) from sources other than the applicants.

Neither own nor third-party contributions may contain funds from the Federal Administration (e.g., Federal Offices, Innosuisse, and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)). To ensure that the overall funding is sufficient for the work programme, the sum of requested SOUR funding and own and third-party contributions enters into the evaluation, see Section 5.2.2. In preparing their budgets, teams must consider the following:

- Only the costs actually incurred and that are absolutely necessary for the fulfilment of the work programme are eligible for funding.[28] Costs incurred before the start date specified in the subsidy contract are not eligible for funding.[29]
- The cumulation of federal financial assistance to fund a project is inadmissible if the legal provisions or rules of any of the concerned funding instruments are breached. For instance, if funding from one instrument has been secured and that assistance is sufficient for the project to go ahead, applying for assistance from other instruments for the same project would result in an inadmissible cumulation.[30] Similarly, an inadmissible cumulation would occur if the maximum funding rate of one instrument is violated by the assistance from other instruments. To prevent inadmissible cumulations, members that seek financial assistance from several federal instruments must clearly disclose all sources of financing and inform all concerned authorities.[31]
- All WPs must be fully funded by the requested SOUR funding, own contributions, and third-party contributions and be independent of unfunded activities.
- At least 15% of the total funding must be dedicated to knowledge and technology transfer (KTT) to communicate, disseminate, and exploit the solution being developed. This includes any activities that advance the commercial maturity of the transformative solution, so that it reaches readiness for commercial follow-on investment as defined in Section 1.2.2 by the end of the project. Eligible activities include, e.g., customer and market validation, market and competitor analyses,

[28] Article 14 para. 1 of the Federal Subsidies Act (SR 616.1).
[29] Article 53 para. 1 of the Federal Energy Act (SR 730.0) and Article 26 para. 1 of the Federal Subsidies Act (SR 616.1).
[30] Article 6 letter c and Article 7 letters c and d of the Federal Subsidies Act (SR 616.1).
[31] Article 12 of the Federal Subsidies Act (SR 616.1).

techno-economic analyses, business-model development, development of IP and exploitation strategies, partnering, and engagement with prospective investors and partners.

The eligibilities of cost types by SOUR funding as well as own and third-party contributions are specified in Table 3-1. There is no entitlement to funding.

Table 3-1: Eligibilities of cost types.

Cost		Eligibilities		
Type	Definition and restrictions	SOUR funding	Own contrib.	Third-party contrib.
Internal costs	Internal costs are personnel costs. The maximum contribution of SOUR funding to internal costs must follow specified hourly rates.[32] VAT cannot be included.	Yes	Yes	Yes
External costs	External costs include: • equipment (e.g., devices and consumables), • external services (e.g., subcontracts), • expenses (e.g., travel, conference fees, certain article processing charges[33]), and • other costs (e.g., licenses). The maximum contribution of SOUR funding to equipment purchases must correspond to the actual use of the equipment in SOUR projects. The remainder can be declared as own contribution. VAT can be included.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Overhead	Cannot be covered through SOUR funding.[34] The following may be reported as costs covered by own and third-party contributions: • Internal costs for administrative personnel, which must be calculated not as a fixed percentage of the sum of internal and external costs, but by multiplying the personnel hours by the specified hourly rates. • External costs not specifically related to the fulfilment of the work programme, e.g., costs related to the maintenance of standard laboratory facilities and standard consumables.	No	Yes	Yes
Patent fees	Cannot be covered by SOUR funding.	No	Yes	Yes
Depreciation	Cannot be covered by SOUR funding.[35]	No	No	No
Interest on capital costs	Cannot be covered by SOUR funding.[36]	No	No	No

3.3 Other requirements

The SFOE subscribes to the notion of Open Science and expects that results and data generated by funded projects are publicly accessible. To protect patent applications, public access may be delayed through appropriate grace periods. Should legal restrictions, e.g., due to confidentiality agreements with

[32] See Appendix VI of the Directive on the submission and evaluation of applications for financial support of energy research, pilot and demonstration projects and sandbox projects. The currently valid directive is dated 19 December 2024.

[33] SOUR funding may be used to cover article processing charges for full open access to peer-reviewed articles based on results by SOUR teams, provided that the charges are not covered by the applying institutions and do not exceed those covered by the SNSF. Starting 1 January 2027, the SNSF will cap the covered charges at CHF 3'500 and will not cover charges higher than this cap, not even partially: SNSF to adapt its open access funding.

[34] Article 14 para. 1 of the Federal Subsidy Act (SR 616.1).

[35] Article 14 para. 3 of the Federal Subsidy Act (SR 616.1).

[36] Article 14 para. 2 of the Federal Subsidy Act (SR 616.1).

commercialisation partners, prevent public access to the data as originally generated, teams are expected to create a publicly accessible version through aggregation, anonymisation, or normalisation. Furthermore, teams are encouraged to publish data that is of national interest on the Swiss public administration's central portal for open government data and data that is related to the modelling of the Swiss energy-system on CROSSDat. (The SFOE can be consulted at ogd@bfe.admin.ch for advice about publishing data on the portal.)

4 Submission

A complete application must contain a proposal and curricula vitae (CVs) for the PI and the Co-PIs.

The PI must submit the proposal as Microsoft Word and pdf files via e-submission SFOE (available in German, French, or Italian) with the subject line "**SOUR: Proposal of *Acronym***" (in the field "Betreff" in German, "Objet" in French, and "Oggetto" in Italian), where *Acronym* is the project acronym, **by the deadline stated on the title page**. The file names must be *Acronym*_proposal.{docx,pdf}. Upon successful submission, an automatic confirmation will be sent.

The proposal must be prepared in English using the template that is available on the SWEET website. The font, font size, line spacing, and margins must not be changed, otherwise the proposal will not be considered for evaluation. Furthermore, the page limits specified in the template must be obeyed. Content that exceeds a specified limit or that was not specifically requested will be removed before the proposal is evaluated.

The CVs, for which there is no template, must include the following:

- Contact information
- Education and training (including institutions, degrees/certificates, and durations)
- Employment history (for all professional/academic positions, irrespective of whether employment was full- or part-time, in chronological order and with brief descriptions)
- Awards and honors
- List of not more than 10 peer-reviewed publications most relevant to the proposed project
- List of not more than 10 non-peer-reviewed publications most relevant to the proposed project
- List of not more than 10 patents or patent applications most relevant to the proposed project
- Narratives of not more than 3 significant achievements most relevant to the proposed project

Each CV is limited to 5 pages.

5 Evaluation

5.1 Admissibility check by the SFOE

The SFOE checks that each proposal meets the admissibility criteria in Table 5-1. Proposals that do not satisfy all criteria will be rejected and not evaluated. The SFOE will inform the PIs of rejected applications in writing, stating which criteria were not met.

Table 5-1: Admissibility criteria used in the formal check.

Nr.	Criterion	Fulfilled?
A1	Has the submission been received before the deadline?	Yes / no
A2	Is the submission complete and prepared with the correct template, formatting, and language?	Yes / no
A3	Have all self-declarations been answered positively?	Yes / no
A4	Have the page limits in the proposal and CVs been adhered to?	Yes / no
A5	Does the proposal address at least one of the indicators specified in Section 2 of the Call Guideline?	Yes / no
A6	Is the requested SOUR funding not more than 1.33 Mio. CHF?	Yes / no
A7	Are the PI and Co-PIs employees of a Swiss institution of higher education, a Swiss private-sector company, or a Swiss non-commercial research organisation?	Yes / no
A8	Is at least 15% of the total funding dedicated to KTT activities?	Yes / no

5.2 Evaluation by the call director

Proposals that have passed the admissibility check will be evaluated by the call director, supported by SFOE experts and the commercialisation expert. The evaluation proceeds in two stages.

5.2.1 Stage 1: Eligibility

In the first stage, the eligibility of the proposals is evaluated. A proposal is deemed to be eligible if the proposed project fits the characteristics of the call, see Section 1.2.2. The eligibility of a proposal is determined on the basis of Section 1 of the proposal using the criteria in Table 5-2. Proposals that do not satisfy all eligibility criteria will be rejected and will not proceed to the second stage. The SFOE will inform the PIs of rejected applications in writing, stating which criteria were not met.

Table 5-2: Eligibility criteria used in stage 1 of the evaluation.

Nr.	Criterion	Fulfilled?
E1	Is the solution clearly described and does it address a white space (as defined in Section 1.2.1)?	Yes / no
E2	Does the solution have the potential to be transformative (as defined in Section 1.2.2)?	Yes / no
E3	Does the project build on prior work at TRL 2 or 3?	Yes / no
E4	Is the project distinct from other projects and is this call its natural “home”?	Yes / no
E5	Does the project combine high risk and high impact?	Yes / no

5.2.2 Stage 2: Quality

The second stage begins by evaluating the proposals in terms of their quality, which refers to the overall soundness, coherence, plausibility, and suitability of the proposal under the evaluation criteria in Table 5-3. The criteria reflect the characteristics of the call and correspond to sections in the proposal template, guiding applicants on where to address each criterion. The aspects outline the scope of each criterion,

but do not constitute separate sub-criteria. Each criterion is assessed holistically and receives a single score according to Table 5-4.

Table 5-3: Overview of the evaluation criteria and weights used in stage 2 of the evaluation.

Criterion	Weight	Aspects included in the criterion
C1 (Section 2): Impact	0.3	- Clarity, ambition, and plausibility of objectives - Balance of ambition and plausibility of delta(s) achieved by solution - Clarity and plausibility of explanation why solution and delta(s) might be major leap
C2 (Section 3): Project plan	0.2	- Suitability of approach to achieve objectives and at least TRL 6 - Soundness of tasks and milestones in relation to objectives - Soundness of suggested go/no-go gates in terms of quantitative targets - Feasibility of schedule - Plausibility of risks and uncertainties and appropriateness of mitigation measures
C3 (Section 4): Commercialisa-tion plan	0.2	- Clarity and persuasiveness of market and competitor analysis - Suitability of commercialisation approach during funding period - Plausibility of outlook for commercial follow-on investment - Plausibility of risks and uncertainties and appropriateness of mitigation measures
C4 (Section 5): Team	0.2	- Qualifications and capabilities of team members relative to project plan - Clarity of the roles and responsibilities - Size of team is conducive to producing major leap - Adequacy and availability of key equipment and facilities
C5 (Section 6): Budget	0.1	- Adequacy of sum of SOUR and matching funding given project objectives and plan - Suitability of budget distribution among team members given project objectives and plan - Suitability of budget distribution across years 1-3 given project objectives and plan

Table 5-4: The scores and their meaning.

Score	Description
5	No reduction in quality due to identified weaknesses (if any).
4	Minor reduction in quality due to identified weaknesses.
3	Moderate reduction in quality due to identified weaknesses.
2	Major reduction in quality due to identified weaknesses.
1	Critical reduction in quality due to identified weaknesses.

Proposals are then ranked based on their overall scores, which are calculated as the weighted average of the criterion-level scores using the weights in Table 5-3. Using the ranking as guidance, the call director has discretion in recommending projects for funding. In exercising discretion, the call director may consider factors such as

- a project's impacts relative to its risks,
- a project's commercial potential relative to its risks,
- a project's contribution to diversifying the portfolio of funded projects, and
- the degree to which funded projects would exploit the call budget.

The final funding decision is ratified by the management board of the SFOE.

The SFOE will inform the PIs about the funding decision and provide an evaluation report. In case of a positive funding decision, the SFOE and the PIs enter the negotiation phase, see Section 6. In the event of a negative funding decision, a formal objection may be submitted within 30 days; thereafter, the SFOE's decision becomes final.

5.3 Treatment of conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest (COI) is deemed to exist if a reasonable outside observer would have grounds to suspect that the evaluation might not be impartial. (It is immaterial whether the COI is actual, potential, or perceived.) COI may arise from institutional, professional, financial, supervisory, advisory, competitive, collaborative, and personal relationships between the call director, the experts supporting the call director, and the team members who prepared the proposals.

Before the evaluation, all proposals are assessed for COI, considering the nature of the relationships, the roles of the persons concerned, and, where relevant, the directness of any relationships. Table 5-5, which is not exhaustive, provides guidance on various relationships and whether they constitute a COI.[37] If the assessment shows that the call director or an expert has a COI, they will not evaluate the concerned proposal. Instead, the proposal will be evaluated by an SFOE expert, who has undergone and passed a COI assessment and will serve as an alternate call director for that proposal. Following their separate evaluations of the proposals, the call director and SFOE expert will jointly recommend proposals for funding. The final funding decision is ratified by the management board of the SFOE.

The SFOE reserves the right to deviate from the guidance to safeguard an impartial evaluation.

Table 5-5: Guidance on relationships and whether they constitute a COI.

Type of relationship	Relationship with team member
Prior substantial collaboration	Normally a COI if within the past five years
Current or planned substantial collaboration	COI
Joint publications or other co-authored outputs	Normally a COI if within the past five years
Affiliation with the same institution and involvement in common tasks	Normally a COI if there is organisational or professional proximity
Supervisory, line-management, mentoring, or dependency relationship	COI
Close family or personal relationship	COI
Paid mandate, consultancy, board role, advisory role, or comparable function	COI if the function creates a relevant professional, governance, or financial proximity to, or influence over, the team member
Direct financial interest in the organisation concerned, such as ownership or other economic interests	COI
General professional acquaintance or occasional contact	Normally not a COI, decided on a case-by-case basis

[37] The table follows the guidance for handling COI by the Swiss National Science Foundation, which complies with Art. 10 of the Administrative Procedure Act.

6 Negotiation and monitoring

During the negotiation phase:

- The call director and the PI negotiate the budget and go/no-go gates. The go/no-go gates become the foundation for the monitoring of progress.
- If there are Co-PIs: The PI negotiates a so-called team agreement that governs the rights and obligations of its members, including intellectual-property rights.
- Once the budget and go/no-go gates have been agreed and the signed team agreement (if applicable) have been submitted to the SFOE, a subsidy contract between the SFOE and the PI's institution will be signed. The subsidy contract ensures, among other things, the flow of SOUR funds via the PI's institution to the institutions of the Co-PIs. The call director may recommend that certain points be addressed and the SFOE may require further clarifications or adjustments before the subsidy contract is signed.

Funded projects will be supported by commercialisation experts through regular training and mentoring workshops.

The progress of the projects will be monitored by the call director. As part of the monitoring, the teams will be required to provide quarterly progress and finance reports and organize quarterly one-day review meetings (so-called site visits) between the call director, the PI, and the Co-PIs. The go/no-go gates are a critical part of the monitoring. The call director will be supported by a sounding board of commercialisation experts to assess the progress of projects relating to commercialisation. The call director can terminate projects that miss their go/no-go gates to a degree that calls into question their path to commercialisation.

If the call director has a COI with any of the funded projects, his role during the negotiation and monitoring will be assumed by the alternate call director, i.e., the SFOE expert who evaluated the corresponding proposals.

Since this call is a pilot for the ARPA model in Switzerland, the SFOE is interested in understanding how the distinctive features of this funding model are experienced by the funded researchers. To this end, the SFOE will require funded researchers to participate in a few interviews that will be conducted by external evaluation experts who are independent of funding decisions. The insights will help the SFOE understand how the ARPA model could be further adapted.