



SOUR Call 1-2026

Questions and answers (Q&A)

**Please read carefully the SOUR Call Guideline and this Q&A document.
Please phrase your questions in such a way that they can be published without any changes.**



1 General questions

Q 1.1: What does "high risk" mean in the context of this call?

Answer: The term "high risk" refers to the risk of a project not to achieve its declared goals.

2 Questions related to the application procedure

Q 2.1: Must a start-up company already be incorporated at the time of submission, or may a project initially be hosted and submitted by an eligible Swiss research institution, with a start-up subsequently established during the project as part of the commercialisation and implementation plan?

Answer: A proposal may be submitted by any of the eligible institutions, see Section 3.1 of the Call Guideline. The commercialisation plan to be described in Section 4.3 of the Proposal Template may envisage the formation of a start-up company, but there is no expectation that such a start-up is already founded at the time of submitting the proposal.

Q 2.2: How should patent-sensitive technical information be addressed in a SOUR proposal in view of the open-access requirements for project results? Are proposals and their technical annexes treated as confidential during evaluation, and can patentable results be protected before their public disclosure?

Answer: Applicants should provide enough technical information to enable proper evaluation while avoiding unnecessary disclosure of confidential know-how. Proposals will be treated confidentially. The SFOE subscribes to the notion of Open Science, but Section 3.3 of the Call Guideline also expressly states that public access may be delayed in order to protect patent applications.

Q 2.3: Are preliminary letters of interest from prospective scientific, engineering, industrial and commercial partners sufficient at the proposal stage, or must consortium agreements, cooperation agreements or subcontracting agreements already be signed before submission?

Answer: The Call Guideline does not require preliminary letters of interest nor signed consortium agreements as part of the submission.

3 Questions related to scope and eligibility

Q 3.1: Does approach X fit indicator Y and is therefore eligible for funding? (This question has been reformulated to apply to multiple approaches and indicators and protect the ideas of potential applicants.)

Answer: Storage approaches that enable electricity production by renewable energy or that lower CO₂ emissions may be relevant to indicators 3 and 4 or 5 and 6, respectively. The SFOE will not comment on the fit or eligibility of a specific approach. It is the responsibility of applicants to make a case for why their project – not just the approach – fits the call (see Section 1.2.2 of the Call Guideline and Section 1 of the Proposal Template).



Q 3.2: May Swiss universities of applied sciences, research institutes, laboratories and engineering companies responsible for thermodynamic modelling, mechanical design, control-system engineering, prototype construction and experimental testing participate as co-applicants, project partners or subcontractors? Which types of organisations may act as Co-Principal Investigators?

Answer: The Call Guideline explicitly permits Co-PIs to be employees of a Swiss institution of higher education, a Swiss private-sector company, or a Swiss non-commercial research organization (see Section 3.1 of the Call Guideline). Consequently, Swiss universities of applied sciences, Swiss research institutes and Swiss private-sector engineering companies may participate as PI or Co-PI institutions.

Q 3.3: What minimum analytical or experimental evidence is expected at the proposal stage for a technology starting at approximately TRL 2–3? Can analytical calculations, simulations and experiments on individual components be sufficient, or must an integrated laboratory demonstrator already exist before submission?

Answer: The directive on the submission and evaluation of applications for financial support of energy research, pilot and demonstration projects and authorization of sandbox projects, cited on p. 6 of the Call Guideline, describes TRL 2 as follows: “Once basic principles are observed, practical applications can be invented. Applications are speculative, and there may be no proof or detailed analysis to support the assumptions. Examples are still limited to analytical studies. Supporting information includes publications or other references that outline the application under consideration and that provide analysis to support the concept. The idea moves from pure research at TRL 1 to applied research at TRL 2. Most of the work involves analytical or written studies with the emphasis on understanding the science better. Experimental work is designed to corroborate the basic scientific observations made at TRL 1.”

It is important to note that your prior work is expected to have reached TRL 2 at least so that the work to be financed through this call can be considered to start from TRL 3.

Q 3.4: Are the design, construction and laboratory testing of a functional experimental prototype eligible project activities, provided that they are necessary to answer the project’s research questions and validate the underlying scientific and technical hypotheses?

Answer: Yes, such activities are eligible (see Section 3.2 in the Call Guideline).

Q 3.5: A project starts from TRL 2-3 and aims to reach TRL 6 by developing a technology based on a novel, potentially disruptive catalyst and operating conditions for an emerging process concept. The final TRL 6 demonstration would be carried out in an existing pilot plant owned by an industrial partner, which would require adaptation and operation under substantially different conditions than its current use. Is such an approach eligible under the SOUR call?

Answer: The Call Guideline states that projects should build on prior work at TRL 2 or 3 and achieve at least TRL 6 by the end of the project. TRL 6 is defined as the validation of a similar engineering and pilot system (prototype) in a relevant environment. The use of an existing pilot plant for such a validation is not, by itself, incompatible with the call. The assessment of TRL depends on the maturity of the technology being developed rather than on the existence of pilot infrastructure. However, the SFOE will not comment on the fit or eligibility of a specific project or approach. It is the responsibility of applicants to make a case for why their project satisfies the requirements and eligibility criteria of the call (see Q3.1).



Q 3.6: Can a foreign SME that owns the pre-existing/background technology participate in a SOUR-funded project as a paid external subcontractor or external service provider to an eligible Swiss PI organisation?

If yes, are there any limits on the proportion of the project budget or scope of work that may be subcontracted to a non-Swiss company?

Answer: Yes, foreign subcontractors may participate in a SOUR project, provided that their contributions are essential to achieving the project's objectives, cannot be provided by Swiss entities, and generate added value in Switzerland. Please note that SOUR funding is intended to support Swiss PIs and Co-PIs who develop and lead the project themselves. Swiss PI and Co-PI are expected to retain scientific and technical leadership and recruit their team and any subcontractors themselves. Projects should not be structured in a way that places a (foreign) subcontractor at the centre of the technical or scientific work. Applicants should also note that the project team is part of the evaluation. The proposal must demonstrate that the evaluated team possesses the qualifications and capabilities required to deliver transformative solution. Subcontracting can therefore complement but not replace the capabilities of the project team.

The SFOE expects that a subcontractor's contribution to the project is clearly defined, limited in scope, and temporary. Dedicating a considerable portion of SOUR funding to subcontracting broader tasks over longer durations would not be consistent with this expectation. Proposals must explain why the subcontractor's contributions cannot be provided by the Swiss PI, Co-PIs, or other team members involved in the project. This will be checked by SFOE to ensure that subcontracting is not used to circumvent the expectation that the project's key capabilities, leadership, and substantive work reside within the evaluated team.

Q 3.7: May the foreign SME perform core software/R&D work under a subcontract, or are foreign subcontracts limited to specific supporting activities?

Answer: The same principles as under Q3.6 apply. Subcontracted work should generally be limited and complementary to the activities of the project team. It is expected that core R&D or software development tasks will be carried out by the project team itself.

Q 3.8: Are there any additional eligibility, procurement, IP, or cost-reimbursement requirements that would apply to a subcontract?

Answer: As a general principle, intellectual property (IP) developed within a SOUR project belongs to the applicant (PI/Co-PI institutions); this will be specified in the subsidy contract. The SFOE expects that results and data generated by funded projects are publicly accessible (see Section 3.3 of the Call Guideline). External services such as subcontracts are classified as external costs (see Table 3-1 in the Call Guideline). The question of eligibility has already been answered in the previous questions.

Q 3.9: Can a non-Swiss SME be formally named as a project/team partner in the proposal even though it cannot act as PI or Co-PI?

Answer: No. According to the SOUR proposal template, the project team consists of the PI, Co-PIs and other team members supported through SOUR funding and matching funding (Section 5 of the Proposal Template). A foreign SME acting as a paid subcontractor or service provider is not part of the evaluated project team and should instead be described as an external subcontractor.

Please note that this answer applies only to cases where the foreign SME participates as a paid subcontractor or service provider. For general guidance on the involvement of specialists based outside Switzerland, including but not limited to subcontracting arrangements, see Q3.11.



Q 3.10: Can a proposal be submitted through an eligible Swiss university, non-commercial research organisation or Swiss private company whose employee acts as Principal Investigator, while an independent inventor who is not employed by that institution participates as the inventor, project initiator or member of the project team?

Answer: In Section 3.1 of the Call Guideline, it is stated that “A team is led by one Principal Investigator (PI) and may contain one or more Co-PIs. [...] 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.” Thus, an independent inventor who is not employed by Swiss institution of higher education, a Swiss private-sector company, or a Swiss non-commercial research organisation cannot be a PI or Co-PI, but he/she may be an independent team member who is financed through own and/or third-party funds or a subcontractor. Note that subcontractors are not part of the evaluated project team (see Q3.9).

Q 3.11: May specialists residing outside Switzerland, including specialists based in EU and non-EU countries, participate as project team members, external experts or subcontractors? Under which conditions, if any, may their work and related costs be financed through the project budget?

Answer: Specialists residing outside Switzerland can participate in a SOUR project as subcontractors or as independent team member financed through their own and/or third-party funds. For further information on (foreign) subcontractors, see Q3.6.