SNSF Starting Grant (StG)

Proposal Clinic

Grants Office (incl. selected slides from SNSF event on 14.11.23)
30.11.23

Disclaimer: The Grants Office assumes no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the information here. All writing tips are suggestions only.

Grants Office
Team

Find your Grants Advisor
(by Faculty)

Contact us: grantsoffice@unibe.ch

Grants Office StG website

Contact SNSF: stg@snf.ch, 031 308 2222

SNSF StG website

Changes relative to last call

- **Confirmation Research Institution:** only one letter, only one deadline

- **No career plan**

- **No revision notes** - every project is evaluated individually

- **No use-inspired data container**

- **Resubmission rule:** Possibility to submit a **third time** for applicants whose project reached the second evaluation phase for the SNSF Starting Grants 2023 and that was rejected in 2022

General proposal-writing tips

Tell a compelling story – a funding proposal is not an academic paper.

Include an overview figure to illustrate your project idea.

Many reviewers will be from other fields – avoid jargon and make the proposal as easy to read and understand as possible.

This is your project, so when talking about the big picture use “I”.

The quality of writing affects the reviewers’ confidence in the applicant.

→ There is no grantsmanship that will turn a bad project into a good one, but there are many ways to hide a good project.

Research Plan

60,000 character limit, 1.5 line spacing, min. 11 pt font, max. 15 pages

The research plan must be structured into the following sections:

Section a: State-of-the-art and objectives	Specify the proposal objectives in the context of the state-of-the-art in the research field. It should be clear how and why the proposed work is important for the field, and what impact it will have if successful, such as how it may open up new horizons or opportunities for science, technology or scholarship. Specify any particularly challenging or unconventional aspects of the proposal, including multi- or inter-disciplinary aspects.
Section b: Methodology	Describe the proposed methodology in detail including any key intermediate goals. Explain and justify the methodology in relation to the state-of-the-art, and particularly novel or unconventional aspects. Highlight any intermediate stages where results may require adjustments to the project planning.

Section a: State-of-the-art and objectives
Possible storyline

Briefly summarize the current state of research in your field that is relevant to your project.

Identify the knowledge gaps or critical needs.

Describe how your project will solve this gap or need
(incl. challenging, multidisciplinary aspects).

Explain how your project is innovative and what impact it will have.

Section a: State-of-the-art and objectives
Possible hierarchy for objectives

Overarching aim

that is achieved through 3-4 specific, measurable objectives (possible to assess if they have been achieved)

that are carried out in Work Packages with key intermediate goals / tasks (described in Section b).

Section a: State-of-the-art and objectives
Consistency

If you have an aim, it should be the same throughout the proposal.

In your field, it may be standard practice to state a hypothesis.

There should be a logical flow in the objectives to tell the story of the project.

The objectives/hypothesis in Section a should be identical in Section b.

Section b: Methodology
Level of detail

Provide enough detail so the reviewers can assess if your project is feasible.

Your methodology section should convince the reviewers that you have considered all the aspects and have a well-planned project.

If you are conducting a study with animals or people, be specific about numbers, population type, etc.

If you need samples or access to an external library, resource or equipment platform, indicate that this is already secured / feasible.

Section b: Methodology
Risk

Is your project feasible? Do you have relevant preliminary data to support your idea? Or expertise you have applied before?

What is your back-up plan? What are the stages/milestones in your project where this might be necessary?

If you lack expertise in a particular area, include an experienced postdoc or the support of an expert.

→ Anticipate the reviewers' questions and address them – if you can see a risk, they will as well.

Section b: Methodology
Gain

What are the particularly novel aspects of your methodology?
(If it has never been done before, state that.)

What makes your project worth funding despite the risk?

What will your field gain from the successful completion of your project?

It should also be clear why you are suited to carrying out this project.

→ Be specific – it is not enough to state that your project is important or will impact your field.

After you have a solid proposal draft

Ask yourself:

Are the objectives specific and measurable?

Is the methodology clear and focused?

Is the significance strong and obvious?

Ask a successful applicant if you can look at their proposal.

Ask colleagues to read your proposal, also those outside your field.

If necessary, have a native English speaker check the language.

Evaluation criteria

Research project

Scientific Excellence

Ground-breaking nature & potential impact:

- To what extent are important challenges addressed?
- To what extent are the objectives beyond the state of the art?

Scientific approach:

- *Feasible* bearing in mind ground-breaking nature?
- Methodology and working arrangement, resources and timescales *appropriate*?

Applicant

Intellectual capacity and creativity:

- Ability to conduct ground-breaking research?
- Evidence of creative and original thinking?
- Scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute project?

mySNF – Documents to upload (pdfs)

- Research Plan
- CV and major achievements (same language as Research Plan; created online in the SNSF Portal and then uploaded)
- Higher education institution confirmation letter (see Grants Office webpage for instructions – an internal commitment letter is required)
- Cover letter (e.g. a short summary, special eligibility circumstances)
- PhD certificate

All other information is entered directly in mySNF.