



Call for proposals

Evaluation of Switzerland's bilateral cooperation programmes in science and technology

1. Background

Switzerland's new "International Strategy for Education, Research and Innovation (ERI)" was approved by the Federal Council in July 2018. It is an update of the 2010 strategy, but maintains its general principles: on the one hand, internationalisation is considered an opportunity for ERI stakeholders and, on the other hand, the Confederation's policy aims to encourage the autonomy, excellence, creativity, competition and innovative capacity of Swiss institutions. The Confederation's role therefore is to continuously create framework conditions, which can include financial resources¹ that promote autonomous activities and "bottom-up" cooperation at an international level by Swiss ERI stakeholders.

In addition to instruments such as the European Framework Programmes and participation in international research organisations, Switzerland bestows great importance also on bilateral collaboration, with a specific focus on non-European countries with a high scientific potential. After a first pilot phase, in 2008 the Confederation launched several bilateral science and technology collaboration programmes with the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), as well as with Japan and South Korea. Based on the principles of scientific excellence, mutual interest and co-financing, their objectives are:

- to encourage the diversification and intensification of international partnerships through the provision of cooperation instruments;
- to contribute to remove, as far as possible, obstacles to cooperation, such as those resulting from different funding systems, cultural, linguistic or geographical distance.

In the same spirit, the implemented programmes can also facilitate exchanges, particularly between national funding agencies, or support Swiss universities and research institutions in their internationalisation efforts. At the same time, they also contribute to strengthening Switzerland's international profile and image abroad, in terms of premium ERI-location as well as in general: the collaboration in ERI is almost always on the agenda of high level political meetings between Switzerland and the concerned countries.

In the 2008-2012 period, the programmes focused on countries which had been identified as priorities and later described in the 2010 International Strategy. Since 2013, activities have been extended to other countries and regions outside of Europe, in order to assess the potential for collaboration with emerging scientific leaders.

About **Bilateral programmes**:

- **Political framework conditions:** bilateral scientific cooperation agreements have been signed with priority countries and joint committees meeting every 2-3 years have been established.
- The **management** of bilateral programmes has been delegated to universities, which assume the role of "**Leading House**" for collaboration with one or more countries. The Leading House mandate is assigned by SERI after consultation with Swiss universities on the basis of the expertise or specific strategic focus on the designated region and the links that institutions have or wish to develop therein.
- Since 2013, the Leading Houses' mandate has been extended to cover not only single priority countries, but whole regions. The goal is to further elevate collaboration with the former BRICS priority countries, while identifying and testing the potential for collaboration in perhaps hitherto lesser known spots of scientific excellence.

¹ financial resources are allocated within the framework of the four-year dispatches for education, research and innovation

- In the 2017-2020 period, six Leading Houses are covering all regions outside Europe, with the exception of countries such as the USA, Canada or Singapore, which are already established scientific partners.
- The task of the Leading Houses is to create and/or strengthen links with the region under their responsibility, to represent the Swiss scientific community in specific missions in partner countries and official meetings, and to develop pilot programmes and tailored collaboration instruments, with a view to stimulate and facilitate bilateral collaboration.
- Since 2013, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) has also been mandated to organise joint calls for projects within the framework of bilateral programmes, with the aim of facilitating scientific collaboration and strengthening direct links with sister funding agencies.
- In this context, the swissnex Network² also facilitates contacts between ERI communities and improves Switzerland's visibility abroad.
- An evaluation³ made in 2011 concluded that the bilateral research programmes were a successful funding instrument and encouraged their continuation.

Current situation

The principle of supporting collaboration with countries with scientific potential outside Europe was confirmed during the revision of Switzerland's international ERI strategy. However, after having supported the bilateral programmes for more than a decade, it is important to assess if the objectives have been achieved, if the instruments have proven effective, also in view of mutual learning, and how these programmes should develop in the future.

Moreover, as the Federal Council mentions in its new strategy, the ERI context has changed since the launch of the first bilateral programmes:

- BRICS countries have evolved quite differently with regards to R&D investments and development of scientific capacities. At the same time, other countries or regions have emerged as, or are in the process of developing into, promising partners for scientific collaboration with Switzerland.
- Collaboration between Swiss and foreign researchers has increased significantly;
- The interest of Swiss ERI stakeholders in developing partnerships outside Europe has increased, leading to changes in geographical priorities;
- A broader variety of ERI stakeholders actors are internationally active: in addition to universities, universities of applied sciences, universities of teacher education, research institutes, funding agencies, start-ups, and cantons are now also looking to position themselves internationally.
- There are more funding agencies supporting international collaboration (SNSF, Movetia, Innosuisse, for example) and their instruments have diversified to adapt to a greater variety of needs, not only in research, but also in mobility and innovation.
- In this perspective, it comes to no surprise that the governmental interest for ERI international/bilateral activities even increased, encompassing a growing number of countries, and was extended from "Science and Technology" cooperation alone to other related topics, like innovation, science to business entrepreneurship or vocational education.

2. Evaluation of bilateral cooperation programmes

Goals

Considering both the changing context and needs of the Swiss ERI community as well as the intention expressed in the updated International Strategy, this mandate aims to assess the relevance and impact of bilateral cooperation programmes and to suggest possible scenarios for the future. More specifically, the evaluation pursues the following objectives:

1. **Overview:** Measure and analyse, the evolution of bilateral collaboration with "priority" countries and evaluate the impact of bilateral programmes in this evolution. Some indicators should be suggested by the evaluators in order to achieve this point.
2. **Adequacy:** Are the existing funding instruments appropriate to achieve the objectives? Do they take into account the specificities of the partner countries? Do they allow for a flexible and rapid response to partners' needs? What are their relationships and complementarity

² www.swissnex.org

³ [B. Lepori and A. Dunkel, 2011, Evaluation of the Impact of Swiss Bilateral Research Programs, USI](#)

with other existing instruments? Do they allow mutual learning? Do they favour better framework conditions for Swiss stakeholders, for instance by “putting Switzerland on the map” in important partner countries or by opening doors to governmental decision makers? Etc.

3. **Governance:** Assess the management model of the programmes that relies on mandates awarded to the Leading Houses and SNSF and make suggestions. Is this management model able to fulfil the goals of the bilateral programmes in both a flexible and sustainable way? Could it be simplified without losing impact?
4. **Communication:** The possibilities offered by the bilateral programmes as well as their achievements are insufficiently known by the ERI community. It is thus requested to identify ways to share and communicate the achievements of bilateral programmes and increase their visibility, in particular among the Swiss ERI community.

3. References

The evaluation covers bilateral programmes, as defined by:

1. Switzerland’s International Strategy for Education, Research and Innovation ([2010](#), [2018](#))
2. The “Dispatch on Education, Research and Innovation” for the 2008-2012, 2013-16 and 2017-20⁴ periods
3. The mandate given to the Leading Houses⁵ and to SNSF
4. Roadmaps for bilateral cooperation between Switzerland and countries⁶ / regions for the period 2017-2020, jointly elaborated by SERI, Leading Houses and SNSF

A comparison with similar policies in other countries is desirable. Furthermore, Switzerland’s Foreign policy strategy 2016-2019 gives the general framework of the country’s objectives and priorities in the framework of international relations⁷.

4. Timeline

What?	Nov. 18	Dec. 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19	Apr 19	Mai 19	Jun 19
Publication of call	23							
Questions	26	7						
Deadline for offers		10						
Possible adjustment of offers		10-14						
Decision		17						
Communication of decision		17						
Kick-off Meeting + SERI experts			7-18					
Meeting with internal group					4-12			
Meeting with expert group						1-12		
Final meeting							13-24	
Final report								3-7

5. Procedure

Content

SERI publishes the call for tenders on www.seval.ch. The offer must include the following elements:

1. Critical understanding of the mandate
2. Proposed approach and methodology
3. Description of experience with similar topics, information about team members (qualification)
4. Definition of tasks of evaluator and SERI

⁴ <https://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/de/home/das-sbf/bfi-2017-2020.html>

⁵ www.sbf.admin.ch for general information and list of Leading Houses

<https://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/en/home/research-and-innovation/international-cooperation-r-and-i/bilateral-programmes.html>

⁶ available upon request

⁷ <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/fdfa/implementing-foreign-policy/foreign-policy-strategy-2016-2019.html>

5. Project organisation
6. Detailed cost allocation
7. Timeline and milestones

The proposal **must not exceed 10 pages (excluding annexes)** and must be submitted in English. The final reports should be composed in English.

The offer will be **evaluated on following criteria**:

Criteria	Weight
Quality of the offer, proactive approach	20%
Critical understanding of the mandate	30%
Organisation and feasibility	10%
Experience and qualification of the team	10%
Cost-benefit ratio	30%

Should questions arise during the preparatory phase, please send them to beatrice.ferrari@sbfi.admin.ch **by 7.12.2018**.

Questions submitted after the deadline will not be answered. Together with the anonymised questions received, all answers will be made available by e-mail to all other providers that announced their interest.

Interested parties are requested to contact Beatrice Ferrari, Head of Bilateral Relations (beatrice.ferrari@sbfi.admin.ch; +41 58 462 48 58) to mention their interest before submitting the proposal. The complete offer must be delivered **by 10.12.2018** by email to beatrice.ferrari@sbfi.admin.ch

6. Budget

The evaluation is financed by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI.

All prices are quoted in Swiss Francs (CHF) and exclusive of VAT. The price excluding VAT includes insurances, expenses, social security contributions, etc.

7. Terms and Conditions

Business processing is done in accordance with the Swiss Confederation's general terms and conditions for service contracts (September 2016 edition).