

PROGRAMME *RESEARCH AND INNOVATION - APPLIED RESEARCH*

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS CALL 2025

The following guidelines for applicants explain how to apply for funding in the Call 2025 of the Programme *Research and Innovation - Applied Research*. The guidelines are based on the *Regulation on the implementation of the second Swiss Contribution to selected member states of the European Union to reduce economic and social disparities within the European Union*.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Legal basis

The Programme *Research and Innovation - Applied Research* (hereafter referred to as *Programme*) is implemented on the basis of the following legal acts:

- *Regulations on the implementation of the second Swiss Contribution to selected member states of the European Union to reduce economic and social disparities within the European Union*, hereinafter referred to as *Regulations*;
- *Framework Agreement between the Republic of Poland and the Swiss Confederation on the implementation of the second Swiss Contribution to selected member states of the European Union to reduce economic and social disparities within the European Union (Official Journal 'Monitor Polski' 2023, item 255)*;
- *Support Measure Agreement between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Minister of Development Funds and Regional Policy on the Support Measure Research and Innovation Programme*;
- Act of 30 April 2010 on the National Centre for Research and Development (Journal of Laws 2024, item 1170);
- Act of 20 July 2018 on the Law of Higher Education and Science, (Journal of Laws 2024, item 1571);
- Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 September 2010 on the detailed mode of performance of tasks of the National Centre for Research and Development (Journal of Laws No 178, item 1200 as amended);
- Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 August 2020 on granting state aid through the National Centre for Research and Development (Journal of Laws 2020, item 1456 as amended).
- Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty (OJ L 187 26.6.2014, p. 1).

1.2. Glossary

Words beginning with a capital letter shall have the meaning defined as follows:

Programme Component (PC) also referred to as a '**project**' – a series of activities carried out with the support of the Swiss Contribution, which is aimed at achieving the agreed objectives and outcomes of the *Programme*;

Programme Component Operator (PCO) – an entity formally responsible for submitting the proposal under the *Programme* and implementing a Programme Component;

Programme Component Partner (PCP) – an entity being part of the international Programme Component consortium;

Principal Investigator (PI) – a researcher having a scientific lead of a project submitted under the *Programme*;

Programme Operator (PO) – the National Centre for Research and Development (NCBR), the agency responsible for the management and implementation of the *Programme* in Poland;

Swiss Programme Partner (SPP) – Innosuisse, the agency responsible for supporting the PO during the implementation of the *Programme*, which is familiar with the relevant Swiss experiences and approaches;

National Coordination Unit (NCU) – the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy of the Republic of Poland designated to coordinate the implementation of the second Swiss Contribution;

Selection Committee (SC) – a body composed of independent foreign experts (outside of Poland and Switzerland) that recommends the list of proposals for funding to the Support Measure Steering Committee;

Support Measure Steering Committee (SM SC) – a committee established by the NCU, responsible for overseeing and steering the implementation of the *Programme*;

Partnership agreement – an agreement between the *Programme Component Operator* and the Programme Component Partner(s) governing the cooperation between them and the implementation of the project;

Project contract – an agreement between the *Programme Operator* and the *Programme Component Operator* acting on behalf of all Programme Component Partner(s) setting out the rules according to which the PO provides funding for project implementation, as well as the rights and responsibilities of the Parties.

2. Applying for funding in the Call 2025

2.1. General outline

2.1.1 *Programme* objective

The *Programme* aims at achieving sustainable development and long-term economic growth through research-based knowledge development.

International research and development projects implemented under the *Programme* should lead to improved competitiveness of companies in applied research.

In addition, the *Programme* is expected to expand cooperative ties between private entities and research institutions with an emphasis on SMEs as engines of innovation and job creation. This will increase the level of innovation of the research conducted and the transfer of results to the economy. Therefore, the expected results should reach high TRL levels, ideally allowing for the commercialization of results and their introduction into the economy.

Additionally, the cooperation of entrepreneurs and researchers within the project is expected to foster common understanding, creativity in the search for new scientific approaches or solutions for global markets, the creation of long-term partnerships and the mobility of qualified researchers and entrepreneurs.

Another goal of the *Programme* is to promote young researchers and women, as participation in joint research projects is an opportunity to improve in one's field of expertise and to build scientific independence toward the formation of their own research teams, thereby advancing their careers. Thus, young and female researchers are strongly encouraged to actively participate in the Call 2025.

2.1.2 Thematic areas

The Call 2025 is not thematically limited. Research planned under the project shall be focused exclusively on civilian applications.

2.1.3 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Project proposals should be in line with and in support of the SDGs. (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>). Projects that objectively counter the SDGs will be rejected.

2.1.4 Ethics and gender equality

The submitted proposals shall be implemented in compliance with the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, including accessibility for persons with disabilities and shall promote gender equality as a cross-cutting priority. The work carried out has to comply with all ethical standards, confirmed by the approvals of the relevant ethics and bioethics committees.

2.1.5 Other

All participating entities shall not be subject to sanction measures and shall not be included in any relevant list, both EU and national, which could in any way constitute a violation of the aforementioned sanction package, in particular the prohibition referred to in Art. 51 of the Council Regulation (EU) No. 833/2014 of July 31, 2014 concerning restrictive measures in connection with Russia's actions destabilizing the situation in Ukraine, and the Law of April 13, 2022 on special solutions to prevent support for aggression against Ukraine and to protect national security, and shall not be associated with persons or entities subject to the sanctions mentioned above.

Furthermore, the granted funds may not be used in any way, both direct or indirect, to provide support to persons or entities subject to the abovementioned sanctions.

The industrial research and development work planned in a project proposal shall be focused exclusively on civilian applications.

Funds may not be awarded to entities which are, at the time of the grant award procedure, bankrupt or being wound up, convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct, not in compliance with their obligations related to the payment of social security contributions

or the payment of taxes, the subject of a judgment for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, money-laundering or any other illegal activity, subject to a conflict of interests or guilty of misrepresenting information.

Any entity which has committed an irregularity in the implementation of any other action under financing provided by the European Union, under financial contributions provided by the EFTA States in relation to the EEA Agreement or under Swiss Enlargement Contribution may be excluded from the selection procedure at any time, with due regard being given to the principle of proportionality.

2.2. Composition of consortium

The eligible consortium must include at least **one Polish enterprise and one Swiss enterprise** eligible according to this Guide. A research organisation may only be part of a consortium if the above condition is met.

Entities from other countries than Poland and Switzerland are allowed to participate in the project using their own funding.

2.3. Eligibility of *Programme Component Operator*

For each proposal, *PCPs* designate a leading entity, referred to as the *PCO*. The *PCO* is formally responsible for submitting the proposal, signing the *Partnership agreement* with the *PCPs*, signing the project contract with the *PO*, distribution of funding among the *PCPs*, submitting periodic and final reports to the *PO* and generally managing all activities related to the project proposal, implementation and closure.

In the Call 2025 of the Programme *Research and Innovation - Applied Research*, **the Programme Component Operator may only be:**

- Enterprise as defined in the Article 1, Annex I, Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, **established in Poland;**
- Research organisation as defined in the Article 2 paragraph 83, Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, and as stipulated in Article 7 paragraph 1 of the Polish Law on Higher Education and Science and Article 37 paragraph 1 of the Act on the National Centre for Research and Development, **established as a legal person in Poland.**

Every abovementioned entity shall be capable of having and amending legal rights and obligations, such as entering into contracts, suing, and being sued. As the appropriateness of the *PCO* to successfully lead the project is an essential element of the evaluation procedure, *PCOs* are advised to submit proposals which are relevant to their track record and experience. The *PCO* shall guarantee that public funds are spent in accordance with the Regulations, the national law and relevant national accounting practices.

Each entity participating in consortium as a *PCO* must be formally established before the submission of a project proposal.

2.4. Eligibility of Programme Component Partner

The following entities are eligible to apply as Programme Component Partners:

- Enterprises as defined in the Article 1, Annex I, Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, **established in Poland or in Switzerland;**
- Research organisations, as defined in the Article 2, paragraph 83, Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, and as stipulated in Article 7 paragraph 1 of the Polish Law on Higher Education and Science and Article 37 paragraph 1 of the Act on the National Centre for Research and Development, **established as a legal person in Poland or in Switzerland.**

Every abovementioned entity shall be capable of having and amending legal rights and obligations within a certain legal system, such as entering into contracts, suing, and being sued.

PCPs shall guarantee a reliable spending of public funds.

All entities participating in a consortium as a PCP, both Polish and Swiss, must be formally established before the submission of a project proposal.

2.5. Principal Investigator

The *Principal Investigator* – PI, is the **lead researcher** holding the primary responsibility for the scientific and technical aspects of the project. The PI is responsible for controlling the technical direction and academic quality of the project and shall ensure that the project is carried out in compliance with the terms, conditions of the Call as well as those specified in the *Regulations*. The Principal Investigator (of any nationality) **must be an employee of the PCO or will have to be employed by the PCO at least for the duration of the project implementation period.**

2.6. Young researchers

The *Programme* devotes special attention to early-stage researchers, who are planning their career in international science. Many young researchers find it difficult to pursue their innovative ideas independently and to find reliable sources of funding. Barriers of entry in international research are high, which may discourage many early-stage researchers from pursuing a research career. Such situation calls for improvement, and with this aim in mind, the Call 2025 features an obligation to include a **mentoring plan for at least one young researcher**¹

¹ Detailed guidance on the mentoring plan can be found in the Proposal Manual in section 4.2.3.

in the proposal. The above condition applies to all project consortia comprising at least one research organisation. Consortia consisting solely of enterprises are exempted from this obligation. In their case, the mentoring plan is optional.

In the Call 2025, a **young researcher** is understood as a person conducting scientific activity who:

- 1) is a doctoral student or an academic teacher – and does not hold a doctoral degree or
- 2) holds a doctoral degree not more than 7 years since obtaining it and is employed in a research organisation (the 7 years period referred to above shall not include periods of leave in connection with parenthood, or periods of receipt of maternity benefit or parental benefit, or periods of receipt of sickness benefit or rehabilitation benefit in connection with incapacity for work, including that caused by a disease requiring medical rehabilitation).

Both mentor and mentee shall be involved in the project implementation.

2.7. Female researchers

The PO will support projects in line with gender equality policies. In the Call 2025, this will be monitored through indicators of the participation of female researchers in funded projects. The aim of this is to strengthen the competencies of female researchers, enabling them to advance significantly in their careers. One of the challenges faced by the Polish scientific community is to increase the involvement of women, both in terms of the number of R&D employees and their role in science, by exploiting their potential and supporting their scientific development and advancement.

2.8. Funding and budgeting

2.8.1. General rules

The total allocation for the Call 2025 is **PLN 66 203 985,86 (sixty-six million two hundred and three thousand nine hundred eighty five and 86/00 PLN) / CHF 14 761 859,14 (fourteen million seven hundred sixty one thousand eight hundred fifty nine and 14/100 CHF).**

The minimum amount of funding per project is **PLN 2,242,400 (two million two hundred forty-two thousand four hundred PLN) / CHF 500 000 (five hundred thousand CHF);** the maximum amount is **PLN 4,484,800 (four million four hundred eighty-four thousand eight hundred PLN) / CHF 1 000 000 (one million CHF).**

The project implementation period is from **24 months** up to **36 months**.

The final cost eligibility date is **31st March 2029**.

Applicants are strongly recommended to thoroughly assess if the project is realistic and feasible taking into consideration the final cost eligibility date in the *Programme* and project duration. The first and final dates of eligibility of each project will be stated in the *project contract*. The project grant rate shall in all cases be set at a level that complies with the State Aid rules in force. The remaining costs of the project shall be provided or obtained by the respective Programme Component Partners.

The eligible costs claimed by the Swiss entities participating in the project shall normally not exceed **40%** of the total eligible costs of Polish and Swiss entities.

Each enterprise, whether from Poland or Switzerland, shall contribute at least **10%** to the total eligible costs of the project.

In the case of participation in a consortium of entities from outside Poland and Switzerland, their share in the total eligible costs of the project shall not exceed **10%**.

The applicant may apply for funding to cover the following types of activities:

- a) Industrial research – planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes or services or for bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes or services. It comprises the creation of component parts of complex systems, and may include the construction of prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems as well as of pilot lines, when necessary for the industrial research and notably for generic technology validation;
- b) Experimental development – acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services. Experimental development may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services in environments representative of real life operating conditions where the primary objective is to make further technical improvements on products, processes or services that are not substantially set. This may include the development of a commercially usable prototype or pilot which is necessarily the final commercial product and which is too expensive to produce for it to be used only for demonstration and validation purposes. Experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements.

According to the Call 2025 rules only industrial research and experimental development will be funded. Other type of activities (e.g. coordination, dissemination, management) cannot be separate WPs and may only be parts of research tasks.

Therefore, from the formal point of view **it is not possible to have a WP dedicated to management and dissemination/communication activities only**. Those activities shall be described and planned within research tasks.

At the same time, we draw your special attention that it is expected to include in the proposal activities related to creating social and economic value from knowledge by linking different areas and sectors and transforming data, know-how and research results into sustainable products, services, solutions and knowledge-based policies that benefit society. All costs of such activities, provided they appear in the “Cost eligibility guide”, are eligible. But as in the case of ‘management, dissemination/communication’, it is not possible to create separate WPs for the aforementioned activities. They should all be included in the research tasks.

2.8.2. Currency

Please note that the currency used for completing the proposal form (see *Proposal Manual*), payments from the *Programme Operator* and settlements between the *Programme Component Operator* and Programme Component Partners is Polish zloty (PLN). The exchange rate to be used for conversions from Swiss francs – CHF to PLN under the Call 2025 is as follows: **CHF 1 = PLN 4.4848**.

During the implementation of the project, transfers from the *PCO* to the Swiss *PCP(s)* will be made in PLN, and will be converted to CHF according to the current exchange rate for the bank. In the case of an unfavourable exchange rate, Swiss *PCPs* are authorized to request the *PCO* to compensate the transferred funds to the level resulting from the exchange rate used to prepare the proposal. In such a situation, the *PCO* is obliged to transfer the missing funds to the partner. To cover these losses, an exchange rate reserve has been established. The *PCO* will be entitled to apply to the PO for covering such exchange rate losses from this reserve.

2.8.3. Eligibility of expenditures

Eligible expenditures of projects are those actually incurred by the *Programme Component Operator* or Programme Component Partner/s, which meet cumulatively the following criteria:

- they are incurred between the first and final dates of eligibility of a project as specified in the *project contract*;
- they are connected with the subject of the *project contract* and they are indicated in the estimated overall budget of the project;
- they are proportionate and necessary for the implementation of the project;
- they are solely used for the purpose of achieving the objective(s) of the project and its expected outcome(s), in a manner consistent with the principles of the economical conduct of business and effective use of financial resources;
- they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular through being recorded in the accounting records of the *Programme Component Operator* or Programme Component Partner/s, determined according to the applicable accounting standards of the country and according to generally accepted accounting principles;
- they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- they comply with the requirements of the applicable public-procurement law, as described in the *Guidelines of the National Coordination Unit for the public procurement* – the guidelines are available in Polish only;
- they are consistent with the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, including accessibility for people with disabilities and the principle of equality between women and men.

Expenditures are deemed to have been incurred when the subject matter has been delivered (in the case of goods) or performed (in the case of services and work), invoiced and paid.

Exceptionally, when the subject matter has been delivered or performed in the final month of eligibility of expenditures, expenditures are also deemed to have been incurred within the dates of eligibility if the invoice has been issued in the month directly following the completion of the eligibility period and paid within the 30 calendar days from the date of invoice issue.

Expenditures incurred after 31st March 2029 shall not be eligible.

The *PCO* and *PCPs* internal accounting and auditing procedures must allow for direct reconciliation of the expenditures and revenue declared in respect of the project with the corresponding accounting statements and supporting documents.

The *Programme Operator* distinguishes between direct costs and indirect costs (see *Cost Eligibility Guides*).

2.8.4. Cost categories

Expenditures incurred in the frame of the project may fall into one of the following categories:

- Staff
- Subcontracting
- Equipment
- Other direct costs
- Overheads

For detailed description of each category and further information regarding expenditures including VAT, please refer to *Cost Eligibility Guides*. Please note that there are two *Cost Eligibility Guides* – a separate one for research organisations and another for enterprises.

2.8.5. State aid rules

Funding in the Call 2025 may cover up to 100% of eligible costs for research organisations.

In case of enterprises, funding quota will be decided on a case-by-case basis depending on the size of the company, type of research/development, under the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 August 2020 on granting state aid through the National Centre for Research and Development (Journal of Laws item 1456, 2020 as amended).

The aid intensity for each beneficiary shall not exceed:

- 50 % of the eligible costs for industrial research;
- 25 % of the eligible costs for experimental development;

The aid intensities for industrial research and experimental development may be increased up to a maximum aid intensity of 80 % of the eligible costs in accordance with the below points (a) to (c), where points (b) and (c) must not be combined with each other:

- a. by 10 percentage points for medium-sized enterprises and by 20 percentage point for small enterprises;
- b. by 15 percentage points if one of the following conditions is fulfilled:
 - (i) the project involves effective collaboration between enterprises among which at least one is a SME, or is carried out in at least two EU Member States, or in an



- EU Member State and in a Contracting Party of the EEA Agreement, and no single enterprise bears more than 70 % of the eligible costs;
- (ii) the project involves effective collaboration between an enterprise and one or more research and knowledge-dissemination organisations, where the latter bear at least 10 % of the eligible costs and have the right to publish their own industrial research results;
 - (iii) the results of the project are widely disseminated through technical and scientific conferences, publication, open access repositories, or free or opensource software;
 - (iv) the applicant commits to, on a timely basis, make available licences for research results of aided research and development projects, which are protected by intellectual property rights, at a market price and on non-exclusive and non-discriminatory basis for use by interested parties in the EEA;
 - (v) the project is **carried out** in the following voivodships: kujawsko-pomorskie, lubelskie, lubuskie, łódzkie, małopolskie, opolskie, podkarpackie, podlaskie, pomorskie, śląskie, świętokrzyskie, warmińsko-mazurskie i zachodniopomorskie or region mazowiecki regionalny.
- c. by 5 percentage points if the research and development project is **carried out** in an assisted region:
- (i) the project is carried out in the following voivodships: dolnośląskie and wielkopolskie, and region warszawski stołeczny on areas within following communes: Baranów, Błonie, Dąbrówka, Dobre, Góra Kalwaria, Grodzisk Mazowiecki, Jadów, Jaktorów, Kałuszyn, Kampinos, Kołbiel, Latowicz, Leoncin, Leszno, Mrozy, Nasielsk, Osieck, Prażmów, Serock, Siennica, Sobienie-Jeziory, Strachówka, Tarczyn, Tłuszcz, Zakroczym and Żabia Wola.

A project is carried out in a region provided the majority of the eligible costs is incurred in that region.

Table 1. State aid rules

	Large Enterprises	Medium Enterprises	Small Enterprises	Research organizations
Industrial Research	Up to 50+5/15* (max 65 %)	Up to 50+10+5/15* (max 75 %)	Up to 50+20+5/15* (max 80 %)	Up to 100 %
Experimental development	Up to 25+5/15* (max 40 %)	Up to 25+10+5/15* (max 50 %)	Up to 25+20+5/15* (max 60 %)	Up to 100 %

*5% and 15% must not be combined with each other

Only industrial research and experimental development will be funded. Other type of activities (e.g. coordination, dissemination, management) may only be parts of Work Packages.

2.9 Project proposal

Programme Component Operators submit project proposals for financial support under the Call 2025 to the *Programme Operator* on behalf of all consortia members.

Programme Component Operator must be duly authorized to represent all Programme Component Partners on behalf of which it submits the project proposal and at least a letter of intent (regarding the conclusion of the *Partnership agreement*) should be signed.

Proposals shall be submitted electronically in **English** through the *Programme Operator's* on-line submission system, available under the following address: <https://lsi.ncbr.gov.pl/>

The *Programme Component Operator* can edit and validate the proposal until the closing date of the Call.

Only proposals that have been completed fully and correctly may be submitted.

Detailed description of the application form and the instruction on how to submit the proposal are presented in *the Proposal Manual*.

Proposals shall be submitted no later than at 16:00:00 (CEST) before the relevant submission deadline provided in the Call announcement.

Only the *Programme Component Operator* (identified by user id and password) is authorised to submit a proposal on behalf of the consortium.

The *Programme Operator* has no access to the proposal until the Call deadline has passed.

Versions of proposals sent on paper, removable electronic storage medium (e.g. CD-ROM portable drive etc.), by email, by fax or any other system will not be regarded as having been received by the *Programme Operator*.

If more than one copy of the same proposal is received, only the most recent eligible version (before deadline) is evaluated.

A proposal may be withdrawn by the *PCO* at any stage of the Call procedure, that is until the publication of the final ranking list. In order to withdraw a proposal, the *PCO* delivers a written statement, signed by the *PCO's* legal representative, to the *PO's* seat. The statement has to indicate clearly the proposal in question and *PCO's* intent to withdraw it. Date of delivery of the abovementioned statement to *PO* will be regarded as date of proposal's withdrawal.

The date and time of receipt of the last version of submitted project proposals are recorded by the on-line submission system. After the submission, an acknowledgement of receipt is sent to the proposal's *PCO*.

In the case of project with similar or the same substantive scope to the project submitted in the Call 2024 of the Programme Research and Innovation – Applied Research, this information should be provided in the project proposal.

The *Programme Operator* reserves the right to change the Rules or any document specifying the terms and conditions of the Call 2025 to which the Rules refer. Changes are effective as of the date indicated in the information on these changes published on PO's website. Changes may not result in unequal treatment of applicants.

3. Peer review and selection process

3.1. General outline

Proposals submitted to the *Programme Operator* via the on-line submission system undergo two stages of assessment.

Stage one is the formal (eligibility) assessment, in order to review the proposals for compliance with administrative and eligibility criteria.

Stage two is the scientific peer review. Proposals that passed the formal assessment are submitted by the *Programme Operator* to international peer evaluation. Each proposal will be reviewed by three international experts (outside Poland and Switzerland) who will independently and separately score the proposal according to the evaluation criteria. The result of the assessment is a consensus report.

After the peer review is complete, the *Programme Operator* will draw up the ranking list, based on the international experts' evaluation. Next, the Selection Committee discusses it and recommends the list of proposals for funding to the SM *Steering Committee*. The final ranking list is approved by the SM *Steering Committee*. The *Programme Operator* then issues individual decisions to award funds to projects, based on the final ranking list.

The final ranking list of the proposals will be communicated on the *Programme Operator's* webpage:

<https://www.gov.pl/web/ncbr/ii-edycja-szwajcarsko-polskiego-programu-wspolpracy>

<https://www.gov.pl/web/ncbr-en/2nd-edition-of-the-swiss-polish-cooperation-programme>

After the funding decision has been issued, the *Programme Operator* sends it electronically to the *PCO* of each of the evaluated proposal.

The content of the peer review may be made available to the *PCO* at its request. This is possible after the completion of the Call procedure. The anonymity of the reviewers is preserved.

3.2. Formal (eligibility) assessment

Proposals must fulfil all of the eligibility criteria if they are to be retained for scientific peer-review.

The following eligibility criteria apply to all proposals submitted under the call:

1. Receipt of proposal by the *Programme Operator* before the deadline date and time established in the Call and in compliance with p. 2.9;
2. fulfilment of conditions related to:
 - a) composition of the project consortium as defined in p. 2.2,
 - b) *Programme Component Operator* and Programme Component Partners eligibility as defined in p. 2.3 and 2.4,

- c) minimum and maximum amount of funding quota as defined in p. 2.8.1,
 - d) minimum and maximum project duration and final cost eligibility date as defined in p. 2.8.1,
 - e) types of activities as defined in p. 2.8.1,
 - f) currency as defined in p. 2.8.2,
 - g) cost categories as defined in p. 2.8.4,
 - h) intensity of state aid as defined in p. 2.8.5;
3. confirmation that *Programme Component Operator* and *Programme Component Partners*:
- a) comply with the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, including accessibility for people with disabilities and the principle of equality between women and men, as defined in p. 2.1.4
 - b) comply with all the requirements defined in p. 2.1.5;
4. completeness of the proposal as required in the *Proposal Manual*;
5. accordance with the scope of the call as stipulated in p.2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 – the content of the proposal must be in line with the issues raised in the above-mentioned points; a proposal will only be deemed ineligible on grounds of 'scope' in clear-cut cases.

Formal assessment is carried out by the PO staff in close cooperation with the *Swiss Programme Partner*.

If the proposal fulfils all the eligibility criteria it is sent for scientific peer review.

In case the proposal does not fulfil criterion 1, the proposal is deemed ineligible and left without further assessment, with no right to complaint.

In case the proposal does not fulfil criteria 2a-2f, 3 or 5, the Director of the *Programme Operator* issues a resolution refusing to initiate proceedings with regards to proposal in question. The resolution includes justification for said a decision. *Programme Component Operator* of the proposal in question may file a complaint about such resolution within 7 days from its receipt.

In case the proposal does not fulfil criterion 2g, 2h, 4 it is sent back for amendment or completion.

If the proposal requires an amendment or completion, the *Programme Operator* issues a request to the *Programme Component Operator*. The *PCO* is given 7 calendar days, counting from the day after the request was delivered, to implement all necessary changes and to resubmit the proposal via *Programme Operator's* on-line submission system. The amendment or completion may only refer to administrative parts of the proposal or include obvious errors. **The scientific content-related parts of the proposal (in sections III and IV) must remain unchanged. A proposal may be amended/completed only once.**

If the *Programme Component Operator* fails to implement the requested changes according to the request, or implements changes other than requested, or fails to resubmit the complete proposal in requested time, the proposal is deemed ineligible and left without further assessment, with no right to complaint.

The *Programme Component Operator* of a proposal deemed ineligible in the above mentioned cases will be informed of the grounds for such a decision in writing.

If it becomes clear before, during or after the selection process that due to the new circumstances one or more of the eligibility criteria have not been fulfilled, the proposal is declared ineligible by the *Programme Operator* and is withdrawn from any further examination.

3.3. Scientific peer review

Below are the highlights of the scientific peer review process. For detailed description of the scientific assessment procedure, scoring, etc. please refer to *Guide for Evaluators*.

3.3.1 General rules

The *Programme Operator* sends all eligible proposals to international peer review.

The evaluation process is based on a number of well-established principles:

- Excellence – the projects selected for funding must demonstrate high quality in the context of the criteria set out in the call;
- Transparency – the funding decisions must be based on clearly described rules and procedures, and applicants should receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals;
- Fairness and impartiality – all proposals submitted to the call are treated equally. They are evaluated impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants;
- Confidentiality – all proposals and related data, knowledge and documents communicated to *PO* are treated in confidence;
- Efficiency and effectiveness – evaluation, award and *project contract* preparation should be proceeded as quickly as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation and respecting the legal framework;
- Ethical and gender considerations – any proposal which contravenes fundamental ethical principles may be excluded at any time from the process of evaluation, selection and award.

Proposals are selected and funds are awarded on the basis of the following selection criteria, specified in the *Guide for Evaluators*:

- a) Relevance in relation to the objective and priorities of the Programme;
- b) Scientific and/or technical excellence;
- c) Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management, including quality and implementation capacity of the applicants and contribution to capacity and competence building; and
- d) The potential impact through the development, dissemination and application of project results.

Each proposal that has passed the formal (eligibility) assessment is reviewed by three international experts who independently and separately score the proposal according to the evaluation criteria. In the initial phase of the evaluation each expert works individually and provides scores and comments for each criterion.

They also indicate if the proposal:

- falls entirely out of the scope of the call for proposals; and
- deals with sensitive ethical issues.

Once all the experts to whom a proposal has been assigned have completed their individual assessments, the evaluation progresses to a consensus assessment, representing their common views. The outcome of the consensus step is the consensus report, approved by all the experts. If consensus cannot be reached, the report sets out the majority view of the experts but also records any dissenting views from any particular expert(s).

3.3.2 Scoring system

Experts examine the issues to be considered under each evaluation criterion. For criterion *Relevance in relation to the objective and priorities of the Programme* the scale ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is used. For the rest of criteria, a scale from 0 to 5 is applied. Half point scores may be given. Score values indicate the following assessments:

n/a (0)	The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
Poor (1)	The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
Fair (2)	While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
Good (3)	The proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary.
Very Good (4)	The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.
Excellent (5)	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

A proposal can receive a total number of 25 points in the evaluation procedure. To be recommended for funding, the proposal must receive at least 15 points and pass all the thresholds at the consensus stage according to the values presented in the table below.

Criteria	Thresholds	Weight
1. Relevance	YES	N/A
2. Scientific and/or technical excellence	3/5	x3
3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management	3/5	x1
4. Impact of the project	3/5	x1

3.4. Final ranking list

The *Programme Operator* prepares the preliminary ranking list based on the international experts' evaluation of the proposals that passed the evaluation thresholds. Due account is taken of the scores received and of any advice from the experts. A suggested funding amount is determined for each of these proposals.

Next the preliminary ranking list is discussed by *the Selection Committee (SC)* which is a body composed of independent foreign experts who do not participate in the Scientific peer review as described in 3.3 above and are not citizens of Poland and Switzerland.

The task of the *SC* is to prepare a ranked list of proposals based on the results of the consensus reports and the available call allocation as well as to indicate project proposals recommend to be included in a reserve list. The list prepared by the *SC* is then forwarded by the *PO* to the *Support Measure Steering Committee (SM SC)* for approval.

Following the general ranking order, a number of proposals may be included in the reserve list to allow for eventualities such as the withdrawal of proposals, budget savings or the availability of additional budget from other sources.

The *SM SC* takes the final decision on proposals to be funded, taking into consideration the financial resources available. The *SM SC* has the authority to verify if the selection process has been conducted in accordance with the Regulations, call documentation and the Programme objectives and requirements. No scientific discussion will take place in the meeting of the *SM SC*. The *SM SC* in justified cases may amend the ranking list of the proposals and reserve list (if applicable). The justification for the amendment shall be included in the minutes of the *SM SC*. Finally, the *SM SC* approves the final ranking list containing all proposals selected for financing and reserve list (if applicable) and forwards them to the *Programme Operator* for further processing.

The *Programme Operator* issues individual decisions awarding funds to projects based on the final ranking list approved by the *SM SC*.

In the case of project proposals which are not recommended for funding, including proposals from the reserve list, the *Programme Operator* issues individual decisions on refusal of project funding.

The *Programme Operator* notifies the applicants about the results of the selection process within reasonable time and publishes the results on the *PO's* website.

4. Contracting

4.1 Funding decisions

The funding to the projects is awarded via a decision of the Director of the *Programme Operator*.

Funding decisions specifying the amount awarded, are issued for all proposals selected for financing. For the proposals which have not been recommended for financing, rejection decisions are issued, in writing, including an explanation of the reasons for rejection. All decisions are issued no later than 9 months after the call closure.

Prior to issuing the decision, the PO shall invite the *PCO* to provide the documents referred to in item. 2 of Appendix No. 1 to the Guide. The PO shall specify the procedure and deadline for delivery of the documents. Failure by the *PCO* to meet the deadline specified by the PO to deliver the documents is treated as withdrawal of the proposal and results in the issuance of a decision to discontinuance of the proceedings. The decision in this regard is issued by the Director of the PO.

A decision of the Director of the *Programme Operator* concerning the award of fundings may be appealed against on grounds of procedural breach or other formal issues, to the Appeal Committee of the Council of the National Centre for Research and Development, within 14 days from the date of the decision's delivery. The Appeal Committee of the Council of the National Centre for Research and Development will issue its decision no later than within 3 months after the appeal date. The decision of the Appeal Committee of the Council of the National Centre for Research and Development may be appealed against at the administrative court.

Opinions and scores given by the evaluating experts can never be subject to appeals.

4.2 Necessary amendments and *project contract*

After the funding decision is issued, the negotiation stage is possible. At this stage, the Program Operator may request changes, including modification of the budget, e.g. shifts between budget items, new budget items, deletion of budget item etc. , in accordance with the funding decision. *Programme Component Operators* may be asked for further administrative, legal, technical or financial information necessary for the preparation of the *project contract*.

The amount of funding indicated in the funding decision cannot be negotiated.

If a *project contract* is not signed within a reasonable deadline indicated by the *Programme Operator*, negotiations may be terminated and proposal shall be rejected from funding. The *Programme Operator* may also terminate negotiations if the *Programme Component Operator* proposes to modify the project to the extent that it becomes significantly different from the proposal that has been evaluated and for this reason the *project contract* is not signed within a reasonable deadline indicated by the *Programme Operator*. In the abovementioned cases the Director of the PO issues a decision concerning a declaration of expiration of the previous funding decision.

As a condition for concluding a *project contract*, the *PCO* must submit the documents referred to in item. 3 of Appendix No. 1 to the *Guide*. The PO shall specify the procedure and deadline for delivery of the documents. This deadline may be extended with the approval of the PO.

Failure by the *PCO* to meet the deadline specified by the PO to deliver the documents shall be tantamount to withdrawal from the conclusion of the *project contract*. In such case the Director of the PO issues a decision concerning declaration of the expiration of the previous funding decision.

Once the negotiations have been successfully finalized and all required documents delivered, the *project contract* is signed between the *Programme Operator* and the *Programme Component Operator* acting on behalf of all Programme Component Partners on the basis of the Partnership agreement mentioned in p. 4.3.

4.3 Partnership agreement

A Partnership agreement shall be signed by the *Programme Component Operator* and the Programme Component Partners and delivered to the *Programme Operator* before signing the *project contract* with the PO.

The Partnership agreement must contain the following elements:

- provisions on the roles and responsibilities of the parties;
- provisions on the financial arrangements between the parties, including, but not limited to, which expenditure the project partners can get reimbursed from the project budget;
- provisions on the method of calculating indirect costs and their maximum amount;
- provisions on reporting;
- currency exchange rules for such expenditure and its reimbursement;
- provisions on audits on the project partners;
- a detailed budget;
- provisions on dispute resolution;
- provisions on intellectual property rights, in compliance with State aid rules and Regulation (EU) No 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021.

The Partnership agreement should be concluded in English and should be submitted to the *Programme Operator* before the signing of the *project contract*. The *Programme Operator* verifies if the Partnership agreement complies with requirements mentioned above.

5 Project implementation

5.1 Payment model

The *Programme Operator* ensures a timely transfer of an advance payment and interim payment(s) to the *Programme Component Operator*.

The *Programme Component Operator* is obliged to open and maintain, for the period of implementation of the project, a separate bank account for the funding under the *Programme*.

The PO transfers funds for the implementation of the project to the above-mentioned bank account. The *Programme Component Operator* distributes adequate amounts among Programme Component Partners without undue delay and not later than 15 days from the date of receipt of the payment from the PO. The *Programme Component Operator* and Programme Component Partners are obliged to maintain either a separate accounting system or an adequate accounting code for all transactions relating to the project without prejudice to national accounting rules.

Payments towards the *PCO* are executed in the form of advance payments and, in justified cases, in form of reimbursement of incurred eligible expenditures. The advance payment may be conditional upon the establishment of collateral in one or several of the forms referred to in the Regulation of the Minister of Development Funds and Regional Policy of 21 September 2022 on advance payments under programs financed with European funds (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 2055).

The first advance payment is transferred to the *PCO* based on the signed *project contract*. The maximum value of the first advance payment for *PCO* is up to 30% of the total funding. Subsequent advanced payments will be paid in compliance with the financial schedule of the *PCO*, upon the presentation of a payment request settling at least 70% of the funds from all previously transferred advance payments.

Within the system of settlement of payments to *PCO*, the *PCO* submits to the PO payment requests before the date stipulated in the *project contract*. Payment requests are subject to verification based on a checklist.

In case of justified doubts as to the proper performance of the project and in exceptional cases, e.g. unclear financial status, previous irregularities, warning signals /suspicion of financial abuse, a payment model in the form of reimbursement of incurred expenditure may apply to a project, after the analysis (the analysis concerns in particular the situation of the *Programme Component Operator* or Programme Component Partner(s) as well as scientific and financial progress of the project).

Payments to the *PCO* will be made in PLN by the PO through Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK) by placing a payment order in the system of BGK on the dates compliant with the payment schedule of the European Funds budget for the given year.

5.2 Verification of payment claims

The *Programme Component Operator* and Programme Component Partners document all expenditures incurred in connection with the realization of the project by invoices or alternatively by accounting documents of equivalent probative value. Each original accounting document must be annotated. Documents must be stored in compliance with national and EU regulations.

The PO system of payments to projects based on payment requests (payment claims) submitted by the *Programme Component Operator* will be used as described in the chapter above. The financial information contained in the payment claims is limited to a summary financial statement from the *Programme Component Operator* for the whole project for the date of the payment claim submission, while financial information contained in the annual reports follows the reporting requirements described in p. 5.4 below. Each *Programme Component Operator* files payment claim on the dates specified in the *project contract*. Formal and accounting verification of the payment claim is conducted by employees of the Department of Project Financing of the *Programme Operator* based on a checklist. Verification is approved by the Head of the Department. Verification of the incurred expenditure will be conducted through the assessment of the annual and final reports.

On top of the above, on-the-spot verifications of projects, which may be carried out on a sample basis, will be carried out by the *Programme Operator* and *Swiss Programme Partner*.

Accounting documents (invoices etc.) must be stored in the seat of *Programme Component Operator* and Programme Component Partners and will be checked during the inspections at the projects site or on request in case of need of explanation (i.e. when verifying the annual reports, or at any time if deemed necessary by the *Programme Operator*).

5.3 Proof of expenditure

By the end of the project period, the *Programme Component Operator* submits a proof of expenditure, certifying that the claimed costs are incurred in accordance with the national law and accounting practices, known further as a *certificate*.

The proof of expenditure is a *certificate* issued by an independent auditor qualified to carry out statutory audits of accounting documents, certifying that the claimed costs are incurred in accordance with the Regulation, the national law, relevant national accounting practices and *project contract*. A *certificate* issued by a competent and independent public officer recognized by the relevant national authorities as having a budget and financial control capacity over the entity incurring the costs and who has not been involved in the preparation of the financial statements, certifying that the claimed costs are incurred in accordance with Programme documents, the relevant law, national accounting practices and *project contract*, will also be accepted as sufficient proof of expenditure incurred.

A *certificate* is not required from a *Programme Component Operator* and Programme Component Partners in projects, where the total spent funding from the Programme to the respective *Programme Component Operator* or Programme Component Partner is less than PLN 1 450 000 (one million four hundred fifty thousand PLN).

Based on the national legislation, for projects where the total funding amount exceeds PLN 3 000 000 (three million PLN), the correctness of expenditures incurred by the *Programme Component Operator* and Polish Programme Component Partners is verified in form of an audit carried out by an independent certified auditor. A joint report is prepared for the *Programme Component Operator* and all Polish Programme Component Partners irrespective of the amounts budgeted for individual entities. The audit confirms that the declared expenditures have been incurred in compliance with, the Regulation, Polish legislation, accountancy practices and *project contract*. The cost of the audit is an eligible cost if the audit commenced after completion of at least 80% of the planned expenditure related to project implementation. For these projects an additional proof of expenditure referred above shall not be submitted by the *Programme Component Operator* and Polish Programme Component Partners, as the report mentioned above covers all the obligations. The PO evaluates if the audit recommendations have been fulfilled.

5.4 Periodic reporting

Over the course of the project, the *Programme Component Operator* submits an annual report within 60 days of the end of each 12 and 24 months of the project implementation.

The annual report comprises:

1. A technical report containing:

- an explanation of the work carried out by the participants,
- an overview of the progress of work towards the objectives of the project, including milestones and deliverables identified in the *project contract*. The report must include explanations justifying the differences between the work expected to be carried out in accordance with the *project contract* and that carried out,
- details on the exploitation and dissemination of the results, and - if required in the *project contract* - an updated plan for the exploitation and dissemination of results,

- a comprehensible summary of the activities taken (for the communication purposes of the *Programme Operator* and other Programme stakeholders).

Technical report will be verified by independent external experts.

2. A financial report containing:

- an individual financial statement from each participant for the reporting period concerned. The individual financial statement shall detail and declare the eligible costs for the participant. Amounts which are not declared in the individual financial statement will not be taken into account by the *Programme Operator*.

Each participant must certify that:

- the information provided is complete, reliable and true;
 - the costs declared are eligible;
 - the costs can be substantiated by adequate records and supporting documentation that will be produced on request or in the context of checks, reviews, audits, and investigations,
- an explanation of the use of resources and the information on subcontracting and in-kind contributions provided by third parties from each participant,
 - a summary financial statement from the *Programme Component Operator* consolidating the individual financial statements for the reporting period concerned.

Incurred expenditure reported through the annual reports will be subject to administrative verifications before the report is approved. Verifications to be carried out may cover administrative, financial, technical and physical aspects of projects, as appropriate, and will be in accordance with the principle of proportionality.

5.5 Final reporting

The *Programme Component Operator* submits a final report on behalf of the consortium within 60 days after the end of the project.

The final report comprises:

1. A final technical report, containing:

- an overview of the results and their exploitation and dissemination;
- the conclusions on the project;
- the socio-economic impact of the project: a report covering the wider societal implications of the project, in the form of a questionnaire, including gender equality actions, ethical issues, efforts to involve other actors and to spread awareness, as well as the plan for the use and dissemination of foreground;
- a plain language summary of the results achieved (for the communication purposes of the PO and other Programme stakeholders).

2. A final financial report containing:

- final 'individual financial statement' from each participant for the final reporting period, as defined in the *project contract*;

- a 'final summary financial statement' from the *Programme Component Operator* consolidating the individual financial statements for all reporting periods and including the request for payment of the balance (final payment claim);
- distribution of the financial contribution between the *Programme Component Operator* and Programme Component Partners;
- a *certificate* for each participant, if required, as described in p. 5.3 above;
- joint report of an audit carried out by an independent certified auditor where the total grant amount exceeds PLN 3 million.

6. Further information and queries

6.1 Programme documents

All Programme documents are available in English on the *Programme Operator* website:

<https://www.gov.pl/web/ncbr/ii-edycja-szwajcarsko-polskiego-programu-wspolpracy>

<https://www.gov.pl/web/ncbr-en/2nd-edition-of-the-swiss-polish-cooperation-programme>

6.2 Contact information

For any additional information about the Call 2025 and the Programme 'Applied Research' please contact:

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The following e-mail address should be used when contacting the PO on the matters concerning the Call 2025: sppw-at-ncbr.gov.pl. The timeframe for answering e-mail queries is 3 working days.