

Spark funding instrument: Guidelines for the project description

Version 2025

1 Introduction

The project description provides the basis for the evaluation of the Spark applications. It is the only document that is transmitted to the members of the international pool of researchers designated to evaluate a particular proposal¹. The projects are assessed based on the following evaluation criteria (see Article 10 of the [Spark regulations](#) for details):

- Novelty / unconventionality of the proposed research project
- Scientific quality of the project
- Potential for significant impact

2 Structure of the project description

The project description must consist of one document of original text, written by the applicant themselves. It may not contain any annexes and must be written in English. The project description must be written in accordance with the [rules on good scientific practice](#) and all sources must be cited correctly (note the recommendations below regarding anonymity in self-citations). The SNSF does not consider applications that do not meet the requirements for the project description as defined in the [Spark regulations](#) and the present guidelines.

The project description must be structured as follows:

Title of the project

1. Project summary (max. 1 DIN-A4 page)
2. Project plan (max. 5 DIN-A4 pages and max. 20,000 characters including spaces, footnotes, figures, tables, formulas and references, minimal font size of 10 pt. and 1.5 line spacing) consisting of:
 - 2.1 state of research in the field including a statement explaining the novel and unconventional nature of the project and a description of the extent to which the proposed research project is distinct from existing research and not a continuation thereof;

¹ Spark applications are evaluated in a double-blind process. The identity of the applicant and their CV will not be revealed to the evaluators.

2.2 a detailed description of goals, methods, approach, expected results and possible risks. If you include a budget in the project description (not required), please pay particular attention that it does not compromise anonymity as described below (e.g. do not indicate “Postdoc salary (PI)”);

2.3 description of the potential impact of the research project.

3. Bibliography (no limitations regarding maximum number of pages or characters).

Please refer to the evaluation form (see Spark website) and the relevant aspects for the evaluation described therein.

3 Guidelines for anonymity

The project description must be fully anonymized to ensure that the experts evaluating it cannot identify the applicant, their career stage, their gender, or any previous, current or future position(s) or institution(s). No institutions, departments, or institutes may be named in the project description, irrespective of whether the project is carried out at that institution, department, or institute, or whether a collaboration is planned. This guarantees that the evaluators cannot draw any conclusions about the applicants’ track record but focus their evaluation on the project only. When writing the project description, particular attention should be paid to self-citations, to make sure they do not compromise the anonymity. We recommend adhering to the following principles:

- Omit obvious references to own publications and cite in a neutral way: use phrases such as “According to Mayer (2022), [...]” rather than “As I demonstrated earlier this year, [...] (Mayer 2022)” or “[...] based on our previous research (Mayer 2022, Mayer et al. 2023).
- Balance the number of own publications: if your name appears too often in the bibliography, the evaluators may suspect that you are the author of the proposal.
- Anonymise own preliminary data: to demonstrate feasibility, you may wish to cite preliminary data. If it is your own, it is important to disclose it as such, as the evaluators may otherwise interpretate it as a lack of novelty.
 - For unpublished own data, mention and cite them as “(own unpublished data)”.
 - For published preliminary results, mention and cite them as “(own published data – excluded from the bibliography for anonymity reasons)”. Do not include this reference in the bibliography of the project description. However, please mention and cite the relevant publication in the narrative part of your CV. Your CV will be considered by the administrative offices of the SNSF only.