

Audit of the efficiency of the award procedure for subsidies to museums and collections

Federal Office of Culture

Key facts

The Federal Office of Culture (FOC) is responsible for the development and implementation of the federal cultural policy. Among other things, it grants financial aid to museums, collections and third-party networks for the preservation of cultural heritage. In 2021, the FOC pays a total of CHF 5.7 million in operating subsidies to twelve museums and CHF 6.4 million to seven networks.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the award procedure for operating subsidies to museums and collections. In 2018, the FOC, on behalf of the Federal Council and Parliament, replaced the previous system under which awards were based on direct political decisions with a criteria-based procedure. The change in system was intended to support museums that are particularly relevant to Switzerland's cultural heritage with the help of public tenders. The second tender procedure for the performance period 2023 to 2026 took place in autumn 2020 and had reached the final decision-making stage at the time of the SFAO's audit. Overall, the audit findings were good.

The award process has expanded the group of beneficiaries and is comprehensible

The SFAO considers the processes to be appropriate. The award criteria are transparent, mostly qualitative in nature and offer a certain degree of discretion. The FOC consults external experts in order to ensure objectivity in the assessment of applications for financial aid from museums and collections. One museum appealed to the Federal Administrative Court (FAC) over the rejection of its application. The FAC judged the selection procedure to be adequate, particularly with regard to objectivity and equal treatment of applicants, and rejected the appeal.

The FOC implemented the new criteria-based award procedure without any additional internal resources. It compensated for the additional workload by reallocating tasks internally and by calling in external experts.

Strengthening the transfer of knowledge between the sections and services

In order to assess the cost-effectiveness of the new criteria-based award procedure, the SFAO compared the award criteria and indicators with those from three other FOC subsidies. The comparison showed that the processing costs for the museums and collections were within the FOC's usual norm. Controlling meetings are held annually with the subsidy recipients. The SFAO considers the time and effort required for this to be appropriate. They are no higher for the museums and collections than for the comparator subsidies.

However, it was noted that cross-sectional cooperation could be further strengthened in order to exploit potential synergies and improve the transfer of knowledge.

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