

AUDIT

Audit of IT governance

Swiss National Science Foundation

KEY FACTS

The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) awards most of the public funding for scientific research in Switzerland on behalf of the Confederation. At the end of 2024, the SNSF was funding around 6,000 projects involving some 22,000 researchers. Every year, around 3,000 funding applications are approved and funding of around CHF 1 billion is awarded.

The SNSF has set four strategic priorities for the years 2021 to 2028, which are being implemented as part of multi-year programmes and an IT strategy. The central transformation programme EIGER is modernising research funding with a new, cloud-based IT platform. EIGER and other initiatives are being implemented using modern methods such as lean portfolio management and agile project management.

The SFAO examined whether the SNSF has adequate IT governance. The audit found that IT governance is generally functioning well. Nevertheless, the SNSF must take internal personnel costs into account in its future reporting.

Strategic principles and corporate architecture enable targeted action

The SNSF's IT strategy is aligned with the organisation's strategic goals for 2021–2028 and positions IT as a business partner and driver of digital transformation. The EIGER programme is consistently advancing the optimisation of research funding processes. Vision and guiding principles provide clear orientation, while a sound business reference framework enables fact-based and targeted decisions. The SNSF established central structures with the architecture mandate and the architecture board. Clear responsibilities, defined principles and transparent decision-making processes ensure consistency and facilitate strategy-compliant business development. Tools such as project-accompanying architecture reviews and the modelled target and current landscape facilitate the alignment of the IT system landscape.

Project portfolio management strengthens strategic project steering

The SNSF's project and portfolio management (PPM) combines strategic planning with operational implementation and focuses resources on the most important projects. A structured project life cycle and a standardised procedure ensure transparency and comparability, and quarterly reporting provides a sound basis for decision-making for all stakeholders. The Panorama tool is a complementary management tool that provides a compact overview of current and planned projects. The EFK considers it beneficial to evaluate the requirements for the new Panorama application and to examine its integration into the existing PPM.

Efficient portfolio management thanks to lean principles

The SNSF's IT department implements agile and lean-oriented methods in a structured and practical manner. The lean adaptation of the Scaled Agile Framework and a defined portfolio hierarchy model ensure transparency, efficiency and strategic alignment. End-to-end Kanban processes, flexible roadmaps and standardised templates support evidence-based decisions and coordinated portfolio management.

The SNSF's EIGER programme optimises research funding processes

The EIGER programme is a central component of the SNSF's efforts to digitally transform research funding. Its aim is to simplify and streamline the processes for funding applications. Clear roles, structured management and transparent reporting ensure that decisions are easy to understand. Internal personnel costs are not yet included in the reporting and this would provide an improved basis for management. Practical manuals help to ensure quality in operations and feedback from users and regular process and organisational development promote ongoing improvement. External quality assurance contributes to further optimising the methods.