

EUROPEAN SCIENCE FOUNDATION

STRATEGY

2023 —

2028

SCIENCE  
CONNECT

EUROPEAN  
SCIENCE  
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YOUR PARTNER IN SCIENCE

STRATEGY

2023—

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# Our Mission within the European Scientific Landscape

**European Science Foundation - Science Connect (ESF - Science Connect) is a non-governmental, internationally orientated, non-profit association** established in 1974. Its headquarters are in Strasbourg, France, at the crossroads of many European endeavours.

**ESF - Science Connect membership is open to public or private organisations from European countries** (members of the Council of Europe) who are actors in the European research landscape. Currently, ESF - Science Connect has ten members from eight European countries.

**In 2023, ESF - Science Connect has 42 staff members of 17 different nationalities** and is supported by a community of 120 Research Associates who contrib-

ute to its activities. The organisation has an annual turnover of 7.4 M€.

**ESF - Science Connect has a distinctive profile in the European research landscape**, it represents an asset for policy makers in the efficient implementation of their ambitions.

**ESF - Science Connect also provides the medium for communities and organisations to interact, create gravitas, reduce fragmentation, and coordinate efforts** towards more efficient research activities and more robust contribution to the European scientific landscape.

At the crossroads of science coordination, programme implementation and policy support, **ESF - Science Connect's position**

## › YOUR PARTNER FOR HIGH QUALITY AND INNOVATIVE SCIENCE MANAGEMENT

**As a facilitator and enabler supporting the conduct of scientific research, ESF - Science Connect helps European research stakeholders and actors to deliver high quality science in all disciplines.**

**as a dedicated corporate science manager is unique.** It complements the outstanding work of European policy makers and research organisations.

**Science Management capacity provided by ESF - Science Connect is the hard and soft skills that complement research activities and strengthen their operations and impact. In particular:**

### › PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

- (Co-funded) research programme management and execution
- Research assessment (e.g. projects, grants, fellowships, careers)

### › INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Network set-up and management
- Scientific secretariat (including finance and legal) and support to governance processes
- Landscape mapping and foresight

### › PROJECT MANAGEMENT

- Financial and legal administration of funding envelopes and grants, in particular EC grants
- Co-construction of scientific project proposals and their workplans
- Project coordination and execution

### › COMMUNICATION, DISSEMINATION AND OUTREACH

- Conception and performance of communication strategies
- Website management and social media presence

Science management

## Our Guiding Principles

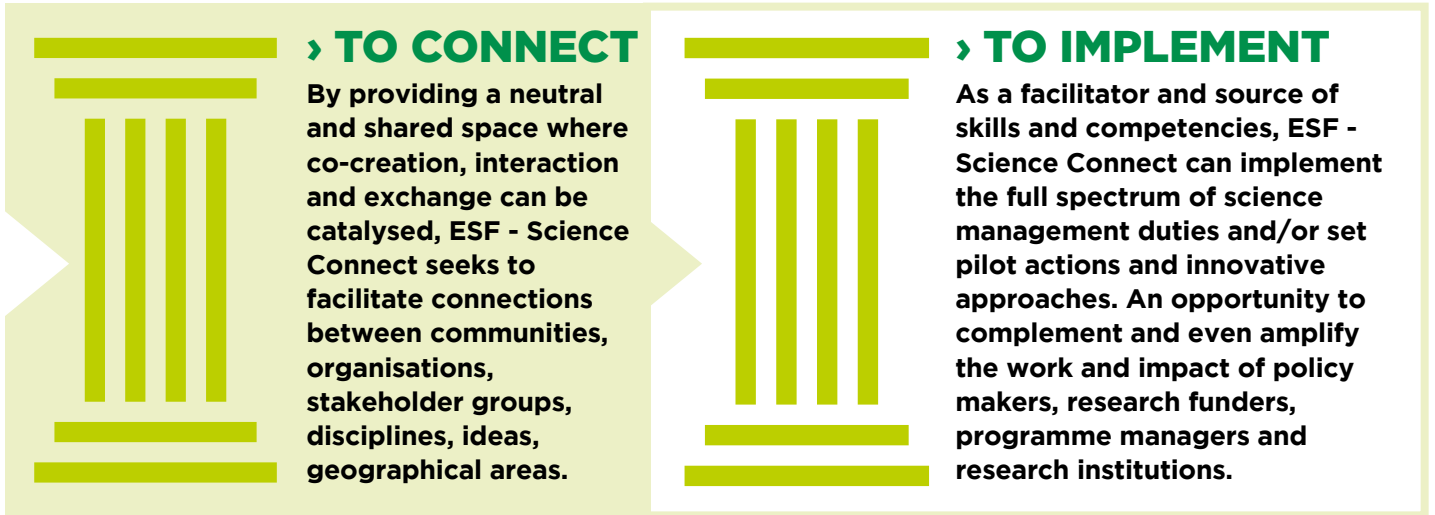
➔ *ESF - Science Connect's* actions are guided by principles of **integrity, openness, excellence, transparency, common interest** and **sustainability**. They are politically neutral, of pan-European and worldwide scope, addressing all domains of science.

➔ *ESF - Science Connect's* talents are at the heart of its contribution to European science. *ESF - Science Connect* strives to **hire, train** and develop **highly competent staff** and **to provide them with a level of autonomy** that will liberate their creativity.

➔ *ESF - Science Connect Diversity* statement. On internal and corporate matters, as well as across its wide network and processes, *ESF - Science Connect* **commits to reflect the diversity of our society(ies) and promote inclusivity in its activities**.

# Our Lines of Action

To serve its mission, ESF - Science Connect structures its activities around two core pillars:



These pillars are not independent of each other: for instance, some endeavours might involve setting up new networks (connect) around specific workplans (implement).

Over the past years, ESF - Science Connect has been developing its activities around four main lines of action of high relevance and value. Their modular and flexible

nature provides strong potential for adaptation to a broader perimeter.

**In line with its mission, ESF - Science Connect will focus on exploiting its competencies and skills to further develop these core activities.**

## 01

➔ **ESF - Science Connect carries out independent scientific assessment**

of research proposals, fellowship applications and promotion of researchers. This results in the provision of quality- controlled assessment reports and/or ranking lists.

➔ **Between 2020 and 2022, ESF - Science Connect**

was involved in more than 90 evaluation campaigns with more than 35 partners, leading to the assessment of over 12,000 applications and research proposals and provision of over 27,000 quality checked assessment reports.



## Research Quality Assessment and Grant Evaluation

Since 2009, ESF - Science Connect has collaborated with third party organisations on grant and fellowship evaluation, supporting them in their efforts to identify and select the best projects and applications. Since 2018 ESF - Science Connect has also been actively involved in the assessment of researchers' careers and academic profiles, as well as the evaluation of research facilities and infrastructure proposals. ESF - Science Connect is also involved in the assessment of thematic session proposals for major scientific events.

The ESF - Science Connect Community of Experts plays a vital role in supporting and sustaining excellence in research assessment. Today it has at its disposal over 10,000 experts across all scientific disciplines, independently selected and invited by ESF - Science Connect.

### AMBITION

ESF - Science Connect has generated significant awareness and interest in its capacity to perform a wide variety of evaluation processes, as well as on the quality of its output. Having a neutral third party to carry out independent scientific assessment is also perceived as a valuable asset for European science.

In the coming period, ESF - Science Connect will:

- ➔ Continue to adapt to the dynamic research assessment landscape. It will also contribute to its growth by developing and setting up fairer and more balanced assessment approaches in line with the agreement on reforming research assessment.
- ➔ Consolidate and reinforce its capacity to serve a wider group of partners in Europe and beyond while maintaining and strengthening its quality control. In particular, it will be available to support national and regional efforts to modernise scientific systems.
- ➔ Investigate how its skills in peer review processes can be applied to a wider range of activities.

“We support research funders, universities and programmes in identifying the best research.”



## Supporting and Hosting of Scientific Structures and Networks

By providing access to its legal structure, staff, support services and facilities, ESF - Science Connect aims to facilitate the work and operations of informal groups of organisations and of established associations who have limited operational capacity (no or few staff). ESF - Science Connect provides tailored support services to these entities: general administration, coordination of activities, communication support as well as financial and contract management.

Through ESF - Science Connect, they develop and implement strategic approaches to their domains in close collaboration with national authorities, European agencies, research entities and international stakeholders.

ESF - Science Connect's support provides them with a home for their operations and strengthens stakeholder capacity to generate impact.

### AMBITION

Four of the eight structures operating with or under ESF's umbrella have joined over the past four years. Two of them are associations with established legal entities who have joined in the past year. This increased level of activity demonstrates the relevance and value of the approach proposed by ESF - Science Connect, and the organisation will endeavour to serve new partnerships. In this context, ESF - Science Connect's support provides an option of sustainability for initiatives and communities having created synergies and momentum through European funding, in particular for distributed research infrastructures that will not take the ERIC route.

Taking the latest partnerships as examples, there seem to be opportunities for ESF - Science Connect to identify and approach existing associations (e.g. AISBLs in Belgium) who would benefit from a stronger operational capacity. More broadly, this approach can offer a tool to contribute to, or complement, the ambitious actions laid out in the new ERA policy agenda. ESF - Science Connect will identify and investigate these opportunities to contribute to the strengthening of the European scientific landscape and development of new partnerships in the coming period.

“We provide tailored secretarial services to scientific networks and structures, enabling them to increase their activities and enhance their impact.”

# 02

➔ **ESF - Science Connect provides a (temporary) operational arm -** scientific secretariats, programme offices, executive offices - to science-related organisations through its own human resources and by giving access to its facilities.

➔ **Currently, ESF - Science Connect hosts and serves eight networks,** committees and associations

➔ **Each structure hosted by ESF - Science Connect has its own Terms of Reference,** governance and decision-making processes, workplan, funding structure and membership. They operate quite independently from ESF - Science Connect's corporate activity and governance.

# 03

➔ **ESF - Science Connect provides a neutral one-stop-shop** for organisations willing to join forces around a common and streamlined research funding effort.



## Management of Co-funded Research Programmes

Since 2019, ESF - Science Connect has developed capacity to fully manage and operate a competitive research programme funded by external sources. This includes framing calls for proposals and organising the competitive call as well as assessment of the proposals. It also includes the post-award phases, including signing the grant agreements on behalf of the funders, processing payments and monitoring projects and their outcomes.

### **AMBITION**

By relying on an experienced third party that takes care of the programme administration, as well as contractual and funding processes, obstacles to the setting up and running of funding programmes are much reduced.

Partnership with ESF - Science Connect can therefore be valuable for small to mid-size philanthropic research funding organisations as well as for organisations whose core activities are not related to programme management (e.g. those focussed on fundraising).

As a testbed, the flexibility and neutrality provided by ESF - Science Connect also provides opportunities to run innovative pilot programme management approaches that public or private research entities might be willing to try.

“We implement and manage research programmes financed by several funding bodies.”





## Strengthening European Projects

ESF's science management expertise naturally complements the scientific skills developed by research institutes and universities.

Involvement of ESF – Science Connect enables a smoother implementation of projects, their integration into a wider context and a better reach into the community. Partner institutions therefore increase the value of their proposals and eventually increase the impact of their activities.

These competencies are relevant to most domains of research. ESF – Science Connect can thus contribute to a wide range of projects across the scientific landscape.

### AMBITION

In the coming period, participation in the European Project will be two-pronged:

- ④ On the one hand, serving the community. ESF – Science Connect will continue to improve and offer its science management competencies (as defined above) to consortia interested in them. This also includes the specific role of coordinator, and will enable ESF – Science Connect to increase its interactions with the community and to contribute to the creation of new networks and initiatives.
- ④ Secondly, ESF – Science Connect will consider European funding as a tool to serve its own objectives as defined through its other activities, e.g. to increase the effectiveness of a network hosted by ESF.

“We coordinate, communicate and participate in multiple EU-funded projects.”

# 04

④ **As a member of consortia, ESF - Science Connect brings its unique set of skills** to contribute to the success of research projects, from proposal to final reporting.

④ **ESF - Science Connect is involved in 15+ EC-funded projects** and success rates are regularly above 30%.

## Other Lines of Action

The European Scientific landscape is very dynamic and evolves at a fast pace. ESF - Science Connect is also involved in an increasing number of activities with an increasing number of partners. This means that the organisation is able to develop new skills and competencies that can be translated into new types of initiatives and/or developed into new competency centres.

## The Way Forward

With the deployment of the new European Research Area (ERA), the European scientific landscape will evolve at a rapid pace. This process will facilitate pooling of expertise and ambitions towards common goals and streamlining the pathways to impact.

Building up on its unique positioning and skillset, ESF - Science Connect will actively contribute to the success of the new ERA. The strategic orientations presented here will allow the organisation to grow in size and recognition and eventually become the sought-after partner when seeking to reinforce research systems in Europe and beyond.

In keeping with these ambitions, the current lines of actions will be further developed and strengthened. This will allow to generate a critical mass of activities and bring ESF - Science Connect to become the recognised not for profit European high quality science management provider by the end of the decade.

“ESF - Science Connect’s position as a dedicated corporate science manager is unique.”



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