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Type: Talk

Communicating research infrastructure upgrades in challenging times

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To stay at the cutting edge of research and technology, large research infrastructures need serious financial support. In times of global instability and budget cuts, our duty to explain why these investments matter has never been more important –or more challenging.

At the Paul Scherrer Institute PSI, we host five large research infrastructures based on particle accelerators on a single site. With many of the applications in fundamental research, these giant machines are costly and often abstract for the public and policymakers. As a publicly funded institution, PSI must explain their value with political neutrality, while still fostering broad support.

The inauguration of the upgraded Swiss Light Source SLS provided a unique opportunity to explore how strategic communication can strengthen policy engagement and public understanding of research infrastructures. The PSI Communications Department developed a multi-channel communication campaign that positioned the event as both a scientific milestone and a national investment in innovation and societal progress.

Through coordinated use of social media, the PSI website, media outreach, and direct contact with political offices, the campaign amplified key messages tailored to different audiences—from policymakers and funding bodies to the research community and the wider public.

As we embark on our next upgrade project, an 80 million Swiss franc upgrade of our proton accelerator, we are building an enduring message about the value of research infrastructures –not just as one-off investments, but as lasting contributions for science and society.

In our talk, we will share strategies we use to engage different audiences in upgrade projects, and reflect on how communication can foster both national pride in research infrastructures and political legitimacy, even in tough political climates.

Workshops only: Duration

Workshops only: participants

Workshops only: Equipment

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