

Guideline to the review process for evaluating applications in strategic research areas

1. Documents presenting rules and guidelines

- Call for Applications, including area descriptions
- Principles for appointing panels for the 20 strategic areas covered by the January 15, 2009 call for grant applications; and the grant review timetable
- This document.

2. Expert panels and the evaluation process

Applicants select a strategic area when they submit their application. Each area has its own expert panel that is responsible for evaluating the applications. The responsible agency's secretary general (or equivalent) appoints the chair of the respective panel. The chair, assisted by the panel secretary (contact person from the responsible agency), then appoints the panel comprised of 5 to 11 additional members. Panel members should be international experts in the strategic area, and the panel should be comprised so it can evaluate the applications based on the criteria specified in the call for applications. The panels should have an equitable gender distribution (the underrepresented gender should comprise at least 40% of the panel). The responsible agency's director general (or equivalent) confirms the panel.

Before the panel meeting, all panel members read all applications submitted in their strategic area. No external experts are consulted. All panel members write an assessment of each application using the evaluation form. The chair appoints one of the panel members to write a draft of the panel's evaluation for each application.

During the panel meeting all applications are reviewed, and the panel arrives at a shared opinion concerning each application and writes the panel's evaluation of each application using the form. The panel also prepares a recommendation indicating which applications should receive priority and the size of each grant, given the existing amount of money allotted to the area. Normally, at least two higher education institutions should be selected for strategic initiatives in the respective areas.¹

After the panel meeting the group sends its evaluation (non-graded) of the application to the respective applicants for comments regarding possible factual errors. Applicants have approximately 24 hours to submit comments.

¹ Regarding the research area Molecular biosciences the following is written in the Research and Innovation Bill: With regard to the importance of and the amount of money allotted to the area several higher education institutions may be selected if the assessment motivates this. (in Swedish: Med hänsyn till områdets betydelse och till beloppets storlek bör ett antal lärosäten kunna komma ifråga för medel förutsatt att utvärderingen ger underlag för detta.)

Two days after the panel meeting the panel holds a teleconference to discuss the comments submitted by the applicants. The panel decides whether to take the comments into consideration and, if so, adds a final comment and then includes a grade in the evaluation. Now the panel also presents its final recommendation on the applications that should receive funding. The recommendations for each strategic area are forwarded to the responsible agency, which decides on the recommendations that should be submitted to the Government in mid June. The Government makes the final decision regarding funding.

3. Research infrastructure

Each application should specify the research infrastructure necessary for fulfilling the proposed programme and to make it competitive in the international forefront. The infrastructure can be divided into two main categories that will be handled in different ways.

The first category concerns needs related to national or international research infrastructures that are included in the "Swedish Research Council's guide to Infrastructure". These proposals will be handled by the Swedish Research Council's Committee for Research Infrastructures (KFI) which will make budget recommendations for research infrastructures of high national strategic value. The recommendations will affect the available budget for some of the strategic areas. They will be decided on by the agencies boards or directors, and will be presented to the panel well before the panel meetings. The recommendations on national and international research infrastructures will be included in the overall recommendations on the strategic areas that will be submitted to the government in the middle of June 2009.

The second category concerns local infrastructure, expensive equipment or new infrastructure not included in the "Swedish Research Council's guide to Infrastructure". For this category, KFI will make a brief report that comments on aspects of national coordination and potential risk for duplications on the more extensive proposals. The report will be submitted to the panels well in advance of their meetings to be used in their assessments of the applications.

4. Conflict of interest

The following rules apply to conflicts of interest regarding the evaluations:

The panel member has a conflict of interest:

1. If, during the past 5 years, the member has been engaged in scientific collaboration with, or has co-authored, or has supervised or been supervised by participating principal investigators, or
2. If special circumstances otherwise indicate that the member should be considered to have a conflict of interest. Such a conflict of interest would exist if, for example, there were a noteworthy dependent relationship, close relationship, personal conflict or competitive

relationship that could compromise the standards for objective and factual evaluation. Panel members shall report their relationship with applicant universities, if such exists.

5. Instructions for and description of the evaluation form

Presented below are the criteria used in the evaluation forms for applications submitted in response to the call in the strategic research areas.

1. Evaluate scientific quality by international comparison (scale: 1–5) based on:
 - a) scientific quality
 - b) potential for development of the scientific environment
 - c) how the area is prioritised among the applicant's activities to generate the conditions for scientific excellence
 - d) strategies to increase Sweden's international scientific competitiveness in the research area

2. Evaluate strategic importance to the business sector and society (scale: 1–5) based on:
 - a) why, and in what way, the research area is, or can become, strategically important for the business sector and society
 - b) strategies and plans to generate benefits from research findings in the research area
 - c) capacity and supportive activities to generate benefits from research findings in the research area
 - d) engagement and participation of the business sector, industrial research institutes, and other community organisations in problem formulation and implementation.

3. Evaluate the need for infrastructure
The need for infrastructure is not a criterion for assessing the application's quality, but the comments highlight the infrastructure that currently exists and that which needs to be financed to enable implementation of the proposed research programme.

4. Overall grade (scale: 1–5)
The panel's summary of the application's quality in relation to the criteria listed above.