



Peer review handbook

Research collaboration between Italy and Sweden
in quantum and solar technologies 2026

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Foreword

Welcome as an expert reviewer for the Swedish Research Council's peer review process in the 2026 call for research collaboration between Italy and Sweden in quantum and solar technologies. Your assignment as a member of the review panel is an important position of trust and the evaluation of research applications constitutes the foundation for the work of the Swedish Research Council.

This handbook has been written to assist you in your forthcoming work and describes the review process step by step. The purpose is to make it easy to find the information that is relevant for the tasks to be carried out. It contains important practical instructions on the grading of applications as well as how the final statements for the applicants shall be written. In addition, you can find information on the Swedish Research Council's general guidelines and on our conflict of interest policy and gender equality strategy.

We are grateful and happy that you have taken on this important mission and are looking forward to collaborating with you. Once again very warm welcome to the Swedish Research Council. We hope you will find the review work rewarding.

Marika Edoff

Secretary General, Committee for Engineering Sciences

The Swedish Research Council

Introduction

This call aims at supporting new or existing joint research activities by providing project grants for Italian and Swedish research groups on quantum or solar technologies. The call is financed both by the Swedish Research Council and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) and is aimed at researchers at an early career stage.

This handbook is designed to reflect the review process step by step. We want to make it easy for you as a panel member to find the information you need for the tasks to be carried out in each step.

Important starting points and principles

Peer review

The Swedish Research Council regards peer review as a guarantor that our support goes to research of the highest scientific quality in all scientific fields. The Board of the Swedish Research Council has formulated guidelines for peer review based on eight principles. [Read the guidelines for peer review.](#)

Conflict of interest

To avoid any conflict of interest situation, we have established strict guidelines. [Read the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy and guidelines for managing conflicts of interest.](#)

If you have a conflict of interest, you must not take part in the handling or assessment of that application during any part of the process. The following applies for panel members:

- Any application where you are the applicant or participating researcher must not be reviewed by your review panel.
- Any application where a close relative of yours is the applicant (does not apply to participating researchers) must not be reviewed by your review panel.

You are obliged to notify any conflict of interest for all applications handled by your review panel.

Gender equality

The Swedish Research Council aims to ensure that women and men have the same success rates and receive the same average grant amounts, taking the nature of the research and the form of support into account. Before the review panel agrees on the priority list, the success rate shall be calculated for women and men respectively. Any differences must be commented on by the review panel. [Read our policy and our guidelines concerning gender equality.](#)

Confidentiality and integrity

Handle the applications and the review of them in a confidential manner:

- Do not disseminate documents that you get access to.
- Delete documents that relate to the review work after completing the task.
- Do not speak to outsiders about what was discussed during the review.
- Do not use information in the application for personal gain.
- Let the Swedish Research Council personnel manage all communications with applicants.

AI in the assessment of applications

Generative AI tools (ChatGPT or similar) must not be used in the scientific assessment of the applications. There is however no prohibition against using digital AI tools for tasks such as improving the language in written statements on applications, as long as this does not entail factual contents or the applicant's personal data being disseminated.

Roles in the review process

Chair and vice chair

The role of the chair is to lead and coordinate the work of the panel. The vice chair's task is to stand in for the chair of the review panel in situations where they cannot or should not take part, such as when the chair has a conflict of interest.

Panel member

As a panel member, you may be a reviewer or a rapporteur. In both roles, you shall read, grade and rank the applications ahead of the review panel meeting. The rapporteur is responsible for presenting the application for discussion at the meeting. As rapporteur, you are also responsible for summarising the review panel's final statement on the application after the meeting.

Observer

An observer from the Committee for Engineering Sciences will monitor and safeguard the quality of the review panel's work. The observer reports back to the Committee for Engineering Sciences and the secretary general responsible after the review.

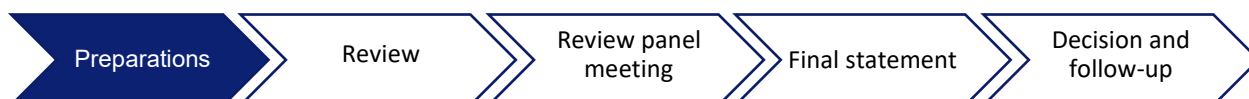
Swedish Research Council personnel

The research officer and senior research officer ensure that the rules and procedure established for the process are complied with. They also support the chair and panel members in the review process.

Secretary general for the Committee of Engineering Sciences

The secretary general has the overall responsibility for the review process and for questions of a scientific nature. The secretary general also handles any complaints following the grant decision.

Preparations



Prisma

As a reviewer, you work in the web-based system Prisma. The first thing to do is to create an account in Prisma, if you do not already have one. Make sure all your account information and personal data are correct. You must also decide whether or not you want to receive remuneration for your review work. Follow the instructions in [Prisma's user manual](#).

Reporting any conflict of interest

Once you have been notified that the applications are accessible in Prisma, you must report any conflict of interest. You should therefore check who the project leader and participating researchers are for all applications allocated to the review panel. Please contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and/or the review panel chair if you have any questions about conflict of interest. If you discover later on in the process that you have a conflict of interest, this must be reported as soon as possible to the chair and the research officer.

Reporting scientific competence

In order to facilitate the allocation of applications to reviewers, you are asked to report your level of scientific competence for assessing each application at the same time as reporting your conflicts of interest in Prisma. The scientific competence is reported on a three-grade scale: low, medium or high. Please note that you may be asked to review an application even though you reported a competence level of medium or low.

In addition, the research officer will send you a link where you fill in your expertise and key words in a database. The information that you provide will help the chair allocate applications to the most suitable reviewers in the panel.

Technical preparations

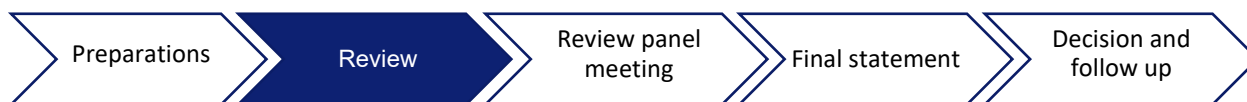
The review panel meeting will be held via the digital platform Zoom. [Download Zoom Desktop client to your computer before the meeting](#).

We recommend that you use a headset with a microphone, if you do not have access to one, you may buy one at the Swedish Research Council's expense, at a maximum cost of 50 EUR or equivalent. We also recommend that you use a large screen next to your laptop computer, if possible.

Preparations: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Provide account information in Prisma.	Before the first digital meeting
☐ Download Zoom.	Before the first digital meeting
☐ Report any conflict of interest.	Before the deadline in Prisma
☐ Report scientific competence	Before the deadline

Review



During the review period, you shall:

- read the applications allocated to you,
- write assessments and preliminary statements,
- grade and rank all the applications you have reviewed.

Once the review process has ended, you will get access to all panel members' assessments in Prisma. Prepare for the review panel meeting discussion by reading the other panel members' assessments.

Individual review

Each application is reviewed and graded by at least three members of the review panel: one rapporteur and two further reviewers.

If you are the rapporteur, you shall write a *preliminary statement*. This shall consist of a numerical grade and written comments on all evaluation criteria. The comments shall highlight strengths and weaknesses in the project described.

In the role as reviewer, you shall write an *assessment*. This shall consist of a numerical grade as well as written comments on all evaluation criteria. It shall highlight the application's strengths and weaknesses but do not need to be detailed. Your written assessments will be a support, both in the discussion during the review panel meeting and for the rapporteur when writing the final statement after the meeting.

Deviations in the application

If you suspect that the content of an application does not follow good research practice or include incorrect information, please inform the Swedish Research Council personnel as soon as possible. Please do not wait until the review panel meeting. Continue with the review unless we notify otherwise. The Swedish Research Council is responsible for further investigation in cases of deviations in the application.

Irrelevant information

Base your assessment only on the contents of the application itself. Irrelevant information must not impact on the assessment. Disregard facts that you believe you know despite them not being included in the application.

Do not disseminate information about the application

You must not disseminate information about the applications or applicants outside of the review panel. Only in exceptional cases, and on condition that you do not show the application itself, it may be justified to ask a colleague about for example the use of specific methods or new research findings.

Ethical aspects

The applicant shall state whether there are any requirements for permits and approvals for the research planned. If there are such requirements, the applicant shall also describe how the permits and approvals will be obtained. If parts of the research will be conducted abroad, the applicant must be able to describe how this may affect any requirements for permits or approvals. Necessary permits and approvals must be in place when the research begins. The assessment of legal and formal requirements is a part of the **feasibility criterion**.

The assessment of ethical aspects also includes examining how applicants reflect on ethical considerations. The evaluation of ethical considerations is part of the criterion for the **scientific quality of the proposed research**.

Sex and gender dimensions

The assessment of the scientific quality of the proposed research includes scrutinising how the sex and gender dimensions are included in the applications. The applicant shall justify their answer, irrespective of whether it is relevant or not. [Read the instructions for how applicants shall consider sex and gender dimensions in research.](#)

Assessment criteria

You shall assess the scientific quality of the application based on four basic criteria:

- Scientific quality of the proposed research
- Novelty and originality
- Merits of the applicant
- Feasibility
- Relevance

The purpose of using several basic criteria is to achieve a multi-faceted assessment.

The criteria are evaluated on a seven-degree or a three-degree scale.

Please use the guiding questions we have produced for each criterion to support the assessment of the application.

Guiding questions

Scientific quality of the proposed research (1–7)

- To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges in relation to existing knowledge and ongoing research worldwide?
- To what extent is the project structured so that it can result in significant progress in addressing these challenges?
- When applicable, how are issues relating to sex and gender perspectives justified and handled in the research plan?
- When applicable, are the ethical considerations for the proposed project properly described and addressed? Does the applicant adequately consider potential suffering of humans and animals, and the balance of risk and value to nature and/or society?

Novelty and originality (1–7)

- To what extent are the objectives novel, original and beyond the state of the art?
- To what extent does the research involve development of novel concepts and approaches, or development between or across disciplines?

Merits of the applicant (1–7)

The assessment of the applicant's merits shall be done based on their relevance for the specific research project and in relation to the applicant's career age. Time off for parental leave, sick leave, or similar circumstances should be deducted.

- How significant is the applicants' scientific productivity, impact and other merits in a national and international perspective, in relation to the research area, and the applicant's career age?

Feasibility (1–3)

- To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible considering the degree to which the proposed research is high risk/high gain?
- To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements (including access to infrastructure, equipment and other resources) appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?
- To what extent does the applicant, and the participating researchers, have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?
- To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources and applicant commitment adequate and properly justified?
- Does the applicant adequately consider relevant legal and formal requirements for the proposed research, such as ethical permits and guidelines?

Relevance (1–3)

In addition to the basic criteria, the review panel will also evaluate your application using an additional criterion, Relevance for the call, on a three-grade scale. The following aspects will then be evaluated:

- Relevance to at least one of the focus areas in the call
- Added value of the bilateral cooperation

Overall grade (1–7)

Weigh together the above subsidiary criteria into an overall grade that reflects your assessment of the application's scientific quality. As a guidance, the scientific quality of the proposed research and the merits of the applicants are the two most important criteria whilst novelty and originality should be given lower weight. For this call also the relevance for the call is an important criterium in the assessment. Feasibility and relevance shall be weighed into the overall rating of the application if it deviates from grade 3.

Grading scales

The assessment of the scientific quality of the proposed research, novelty and originality, and merits of the applicant is done on a seven-degree scale.

Grade	Explanation
7	Outstanding Exceptionally strong application with negligible weaknesses
6	Excellent Very strong application with negligible weaknesses
5	Very good to excellent Very strong application with minor weaknesses
4	Very good Strong application with minor weaknesses
3	Good Some strengths, but also moderate weaknesses
2	Weak A few strengths, but also at least one major weakness or several minor weaknesses
1	Poor Very few strengths, and numerous major weaknesses

The assessment of feasibility and relevance is done on a three-degree scale.

Grade	Explanation
3	Feasible / Relevant

2	Partly feasible / Partly relevant
1	Not feasible / Not relevant

For all criteria, you can also mark “Insufficient (0)”, if you consider that the application lacks sufficient information to allow you to make a reasonable assessment of the criterion. Please note that any such mark may only be used in the individual review before the review panel meeting, and not in the final grade.

Ranking applications

Rank every application in relation to the other applications that you have reviewed, both as reviewer and as rapporteur. The ranking is a supplement to the grading when the review panel’s applications are compared with each other and is essential for preparing the sifting proposal. The individual rankings of all the reviewers are weighed together into a preliminary ranking factor for each application. The applications are then sorted based on this ranking factor and this list is used as a starting point for the sifting proposal. Thus, it is very important that all reviewers complete the ranking before the deadline, to be able to continue with the sifting process. [Instructions for ranking in the Prisma user manual](#).

External reviewers

External review may be used if the joint competency of the review panel is not sufficient for a thorough review or if a conflict of interest situation makes an application difficult to evaluate. In normal cases, the chair determines the need for external reviewers, and the research officer will contact the suggested reviewers. The external reviewers provide written assessments for each subsidiary criterion but no numerical grades.

Sifting

A proportion of the applications are sifted which means that they are not discussed in detail at the review panel meeting and therefore do not receive any specific written comments on the grades. This enables more in-depth discussion of the applications that have a reasonable chance of being funded.

The chair produces a proposed list of the applications to be sifted. The proposal is based on the review panels joint preliminary ranking of the applications and the panel members' individual assessments. The applications that are proposed to be sifted are those where the majority of the panel members agree that they are of lower quality and where it is reasonable to assume that they cannot be considered for funding. Applications that receive an overall grade of 6 or 7 cannot be sifted.

The chair also identifies any applications that, despite having a low ranking, should still be discussed at the meeting, for example where the rankings or gradings by the three reviewers differ considerably.

Around 50 percent of the applications shall be discussed at the review panel meeting, but the exact percentage may vary from one call to another. The applications that are listed for discussion at the review panel meeting shall include both women and men to such an extent that there is a good chance of achieving a gender-equal outcome in relation to the number of applications received.

Ahead of the meeting, you as a panel member will read the sifting proposal, including proposed grades. You can then decide whether any of the sifted applications should be brought up for discussion at the meeting nevertheless.

Prepare for the meeting

Before the meeting, you should prepare brief presentations of strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur. If there are any external reviewers, their assessments should also be presented. The presentation should be brief and to the point, power point presentations are not needed. Please also prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments. They become available in Prisma when the system closes for editing

Review: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Grade and write comments (preliminary statement) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur.	Before the deadline
☐ Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer.	Before the deadline
☐ Rank all applications allocated to you.	Before the deadline
☐ Check the list of sifted applications and decide whether you think any of the sifted applications should be brought up for discussion at the meeting.	Before the meeting
☐ Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments and any external assessments.	Before the meeting
☐ Prepare a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses in the applications for which you are the rapporteur.	Before the meeting

Review panel meeting



Sifted applications

At the start of the review panel meeting, the sifting proposal is introduced. The panel then jointly decides which applications will be sifted. During the meeting, the panel also makes decisions on the grading of the sifted applications.

Discussion of applications

The chair leads the discussion of the applications that have not been sifted. As a rule, the rapporteur begins by presenting an application's strengths and weaknesses. Thereafter, the other reviewers can give their assessments. The chair is responsible for ensuring any external assessments are included in the discussion.

For each application discussed at the meeting, the panel shall agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade. The rapporteur shall take notes to support the wording of the panel's final statement.

All applications shall be treated equally

The review panel is responsible for ensuring each application is assessed on its own merits.

- Irrelevant information shall not be discussed.
- The applications shall compete with each other on equal terms.
- No application shall be given a higher or lower grade because it belongs within a certain subject area.
- The panel shall not carry out any quota-based allocation between scientific disciplines.
- An application is guaranteed a new assessment under each call – even if similar applications have been submitted in conjunction with previous calls.
- There must be a balance in the time the review panel allocates to each application.

Conflict of interest during the review meeting

Persons who have a conflict of interest in relation to an application should not take part in the discussion of that particular application. They should leave the room or the digital meeting while the application is discussed.

If you discover any possible conflict of interest (your own or another's) during the meeting, you should bring this up with the chair and the Swedish Research Council personnel in private.

Prioritisation

Once all applications have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on a joint grading for each application, a prioritisation of the applications with the highest scientific quality shall be carried out. The applications will first be sorted based on the joint grading. If two or more applications have the same grades, they will then be compared against each other.

The result of the prioritisation is the review panel's proposal for applications to be recommended funding. A list with reserves shall also be produced.

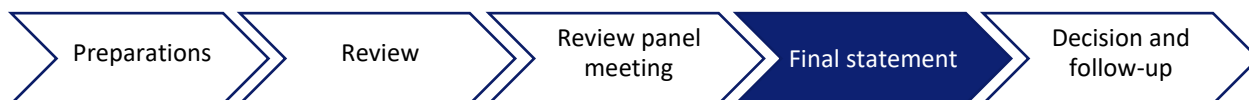
The goal is to have the same success rates for women and men within an area, and the review panel shall consider the success rates in the prioritisation. When applications of equivalent quality are compared, the application that results in a more even outcome of the success rate shall be prioritised.

Review panel meeting: summary

What you need to do

- ☐ Agree on grades for sifted applications.
 - ☐ Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for each application discussed.
 - ☐ Agree on a proposal for the applications to be awarded funding within the review panel's budgetary framework.
 - ☐ Agree on a prioritisation list with reserves.
-

Final statement



The rapporteur writes a final statement

The discussion at the review panel meeting forms the basis for the review panel's joint final statement. The final statement is the end product of the review process to which each application is submitted. It forms the Swedish Research Council's basis for decision-making in the matter, and is also sent to the applicant in conjunction with the grant decision being published.

You are responsible for writing final statements on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. After the meeting, you shall modify the preliminary statement that you wrote before the meeting so that it reflects the review panel's joint assessment of the application. In addition to your notes from the meeting, the assessments from the other reviewers will be available to you in Prisma when you write the final statement. You usually have one week to write final statements following the end of the review panel meeting.

Only applications that have been the subject of discussion at the meeting receive a full final statement. The sifted applications are instead handled by the Swedish Research Council personnel. These applications receive a standard statement describing the sifting process and gradings for the subsidiary criteria and the overall grade.

The chair reviews all final statements

Once the final statements are completed, they are checked by the chair and by the Swedish Research Council personnel. The chair is responsible for ensuring the final statements on the applications discussed at the review panel meeting reflect the panel's discussion, and that the written justifications correspond to the grades. In conjunction with the chair's review, you may be asked to supplement or adjust a final statement.

General advice and recommendations on final statements

The final statement shall reflect the review panel's joint and overall assessment, including any external assessments.

Completing the final statements, you must

- focus on describing the main strengths and weaknesses of the application.

- ensure the written justifications correspond to the grading – feel free to use the definitions in the grading scale in your written comments.
- consider the guiding questions for the different assessment criteria.
- write concisely, but not too briefly – the content is more important than the length of the text.
- comment on whether the review panel has weighed in deviations from the Swedish Research Council's general instructions in the assessment of the application.
- be constructive and factual in your comments.

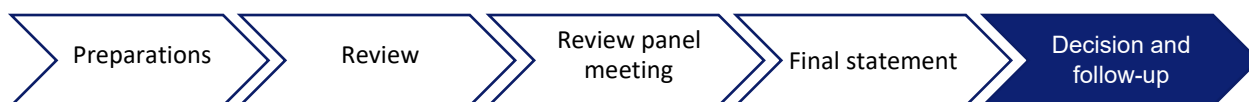
Completing the final statements, you must not

- Summarise the content of the application or the merits of the applicant.
- introduce personal comments – the final statement shall constitute the review panel's joint assessment.
- state quantifiable data.
- state any personal information about the applicant.
- write any recommendation whether to refuse or approve an application in the final statement.
- comment on whether an application belongs in the review panel, as all the applications allocated to the panel shall be assessed.

Final statement: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Write the review panel's final statement in Prisma on the applications for which you are the rapporteur.	One week after the review panel meeting
☐ Supplement final statements following review by the chair, if you have been asked to do so.	After the review panel meeting

Decision and follow-up



Decision

The Board of the Swedish Research Council has delegated the decision on grants in this call to the Committee for Engineering Sciences. The council's decision is based on: the priority lists (including reserves) arrived at by the review panels; any justifications from the chairs; and the review panels' final statements. For this grant, the final result will also be based on the results of the review process made by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Representatives from both parties will meet and decide on a final list of applications recommended for funding. The decision is published shortly thereafter on vr.se and in Prisma. In conjunction with the publication, the applicants are informed about the outcome.

Follow-up

Following each review, internal follow-up is also carried out of the process and the outcome. An important starting point for this follow-up is the feedback you provide as a panel member in conjunction with the review panel meeting. We also produce statistics of various kinds.

Complaints and questions

If you as a review panel member receive any question about the assessment of an individual application, you must refer this to us. The Swedish Research Council personnel make sure that all complaints or requests for clarification are handled.