



Peer review handbook

Research on civil society 2021

Swedish
Research
Council

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Foreword

I would like to welcome you as review panel members within Humanities and Social Sciences at the Swedish Research Council. We are very grateful to you for taking on this task and making an important contribution to the continuous work of ensuring the Swedish Research Council supports research of the highest scientific quality. We hope you will also find the intense process you have ahead of you rewarding to you personally.

A well-executed and systematic peer review of applications is the foundation for ensuring that the best research gets funded. It is very important that each application is reviewed by experts of the field with the highest possible scientific competence. We are therefore very grateful that you are willing to give input to this work. To ensure the scientific evaluation is conducted on clear quality criteria within the framework for a sound evaluation culture and good research practice, the Swedish Research Council has also adopted a number of guidelines for the review work.

This handbook is a tool for you as review panel members within the subject area of Humanities and Social Sciences. The handbook contains instructions and guidelines for how the review process within Humanities and Social Sciences is carried out.

Although the guidelines apply specifically for the review work within Humanities and Social Sciences, they shall always be seen as a complement to the general guidelines that have been adopted for the review work of the Swedish Research Council as a whole (see appendices).

Some information will be updated during the course of the work. You will then receive supplementary information from your review panel chairs, or from the research officer responsible at the Swedish Research Council.

Stefan Svallfors

Secretary General
Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences
Swedish Research Council

Introduction

This handbook is written for reviewers who are members in the review panels that evaluate applications for research project grants for research on civil society at the Swedish Research Council. The purpose of the project grant is to give researchers the freedom to formulate their own research idea, method and implementation, and to solve a specific research task within a limited period. The wide focus of the call means that civil society can be looked at from several different directions. The research may relate to different aspects of civil society, such as its historical development, importance for societal development, organisation and control, and also the motivations for individuals and groups to organise themselves. Other urgent questions are also how civil society, the state and the market relate to and influence each other. Studies may focus on associations, interest organisations and popular movements, and also on transnational organisations and newer forms of social networks. The research can relate to both activities aimed at influencing political processes or the market, and activities aimed at supplementing or replacing state involvement or commercial markets. Studies of local, national and global aspects of the importance and practices of civil society are welcome.

The project grant aims to strengthen Swedish research focused on civil society. Participation by junior researchers in the projects, who may contribute to strengthening and developing the research is welcome.

The grant type is aimed at all researchers who hold a doctoral degree and who will during the project period work at a Swedish university or another Swedish organisation that fulfils the Swedish Research Council's criteria for administrating organisations. Projects awarded funding will be part of a larger research programme focusing on civil society.

This handbook reflects the review process step by step (see figure below). The intention is to make it easier for you as panel member to find the information you need for carrying out your tasks in each step. At the end of each chapter is a summary of the tasks to be carried out. Chapter 8 includes a checklist that summarizes all the tasks you have to complete during the various steps of the process.



In this first section of the handbook, you will find information about some of the starting points and principles that permeate the entire review work, a brief description of the roles of the different persons involved in the process, and also information about some important news in this year's review process.

News this year

Raised ceiling for grant amounts

The scientific council for the humanities and social sciences has decided to raise the ceiling for financing for project grants from 2021. The decision means that the maximum amount for project grants per year is increased from 1 500 000 SEK to 1 700 000 SEK.

Special justification for a fourth project year

The scientific council for the humanities and social sciences has decided that a special justification is required for a fourth project year, as the normal case for project time is three years. The justification for this is made by the applicant in the research plan and the assessment of this falls under the criterion *Feasibility* and under *Assessment of project budget*.

General starting points and principles

There are certain guidelines and principles which apply during all steps in the review work, and which are important for you to know about as a reviewer.

Peer review

In the preamble of the Swedish Research Council's Instruction Ordinance is stated that "the Swedish Research Council shall give support to basic research of the highest scientific quality within all fields of science". In order to provide a basis for the scientific review, the board of the Research Council has formulated guidelines for peer review based on eight principles (see Appendix 1). Some guidelines have already been implemented, while some will be implemented in the future.

Conflict of interest

A process involving peer review means that the evaluation of applications is carried out by researchers who are themselves part of the collective of researchers applying for grants. This creates a particular risk of conflicts of interest. In order to avoid any situation involving a conflict of interest, the Swedish Research Council has established strict internal guidelines (see Appendix 2, the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy). Anyone who has a conflict of interest may not attend when the application is discussed and should not participate in the handling, assessment or discussion of the application or the applicant during any part of the process. In order to prevent the occurrence of conflict situations and to maintain public confidence, the Swedish Research Council has also made the standpoint that an application where a member is an applicant or a participating researcher should not be reviewed in the member's review panel. The same applies if a related party is an applicant (not participating researcher) on an application to the review panel.

As a panel member, you are obliged as applicable to report any conflict of interest in relation to the applications you will be reviewing. In the event of any doubt, please confer with the chair and the Research Council personnel. Ultimately, the responsibility rests with the Research Council. Where a conflict of interest exists, another reviewer will be appointed.

Gender equality

The Swedish Research Council shall promote gender equality within its area of activities. For this reason, the Research Council's Board has decided on a gender equality strategy (see Appendix 3). One of the operational goals for the gender equality strategy is to "ensure that women and men have the same success rates and receive the same average grant amount, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant". Against this background, before adopting its proposal for allocation of grants, review panels shall consider the gender equality goal and calculate the success rates in its proposal, as well as considering and if necessary commenting on the outcome. Within the subject area Humanities and Social Sciences, gender equality is also used as a boundary condition, and when ranking applications of equal quality, applicants from the under-represented gender shall be prioritised.

Confidentiality

Throughout the review process, applications and the review of applications shall be treated confidentially. You must not spread the documents that you have access to in your work as a member, and you must delete them after the assignment has been completed. Nor shall any third parties be informed of what was discussed at the meeting, or of the views of any other reviewers in the ongoing review process. All communications between applicants and the Swedish Research Council concerning the review process or the grounds on which decisions are made shall be carried out via the Research Council's research officer responsible.

Prisma

All the review work is carried out in the web-based system Prisma. In order to carry out the review work in Prisma, you must register as a user in the system – you will find further information in [Prisma's User Manual](#). If you have any questions concerning the system and cannot find the answer in Prisma's user manual, please contact the responsible research officer.

Roles in the review process

Chair and vice chair

The role of the chair is to lead and coordinate the work of the panel, and to ensure in collaboration with the Swedish Research Council's personnel that rules and policies are complied with. The chair allocates applications to reviewers, and is responsible for identifying any need for external reviewers. The chair is also responsible for ensuring the final statements issued by the review panel reflect the panel's discussion and assessments.

The vice chair is appointed by the panel chair in consultation with the observer and with the Research Council personnel. The vice chair's task is to stand in for the chair of the review panel in situations where she or he cannot or should not take part, such as when the chair has a conflict of interest.

Panel member

The tasks of panel members are to review, grade and rank the applications received by the review panel. The panel members shall also assess the budgets of the applications that proceed to the second stage of the review process and suggest grant amounts for the applications that are recommended for funding. The panel members shall participate in the two review panel meetings, where the review panel discusses the applications, and, after the review panel's autumn meeting, write final statements that motivate the review panels assessment and grading for the applications that were discussed in the second review stage.

Observer

A member of the Scientific Council for humanities and social sciences serves as an observer in each review panel. The observer acts as a link to the Scientific Council and fills an important role in upholding the quality of the review process, together with the Swedish Research Council's personnel. Observers provide feedback to the Scientific Council and the responsible Secretary General after each review period. Observers do not take part in the discussion about the content and quality of the applications, but may assist the review panel with their knowledge about the intentions of the guidelines and rules of the Board and the Scientific Council.

Swedish Research Council's personnel

In addition to their roles as administrators for the review panel, the research officer and senior research officer also have the task of ensuring that the rules and procedures established for the process are complied with, and to pass on the Board's intentions for the review. The Swedish Research Council personnel do not participate in the review work.

Secretary General

The Secretary General has overall responsibility for the review process and for questions of a scientific nature. The Secretary General is also the person who deals with any complaints following the grant decision.

1. Call and preparations



The first period covers everything that occurs before you as panel member begin your review work. The panel members are recruited, the call is created and published, the review panel meetings are planned, etc. Once the call has closed, the applications are checked for their compliance to the guidelines for applications and allocated to the review panels. Finally, the chair of the panel allocates the applications to the panel members.

Creating an account in Prisma

During this step, you as a panel member must log into Prisma (or create an account if you do not already have one), and ensure that the account and your personal data are correct. You must also decide whether or not you want to receive remuneration for your review work. There are detailed instructions for how to do this in [Prisma's User Manual](#).

Reporting conflicts of interest

As soon as the applications are available in Prisma, you must report any conflicts of interest you might have. This is done in Prisma. Only when all panel members have reported their conflicts of interest can the panel chair allocate applications to individual members. Contact the chair or the Swedish Research Council's personnel if you have any doubts or questions regarding conflicts of interest. If you discover later on in the process that you have a conflict of interest, you must inform the chair and the responsible research officer.

Allocation of applications to panel members

Each application is allocated to at least three reviewers in the first review step, of which one is given the role of rapporteur. The rapporteur is the reviewer who is responsible for presenting the application for discussion at the meeting, and for summarising the review panel's final statement following the autumn meeting.

Planning and preparation ahead of the review panel meeting

The evaluation group meeting is held over the digital platform Zoom. You can download the Zoom Desktop client to your computer (<https://zoom.us/download>) even before the meeting. You will receive a link to the meeting via email along with the agenda a few days before the meeting. Make sure you have a computer with a computer camera (built-in or external) and a microphone, plus access to a stable network connection. We strongly recommend that you use a headset with a microphone, as this provides the best sound both for yourself and for other participants. If you do not have access to one, you may buy one at our expense, however at a maximum cost of 50 EUR or equivalent. If you are able to use a large screen in addition to your laptop, we recommend that you do so.

Summary of your tasks:

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- State account information in Prisma.
 - Prepare and evaluate your conditions for a digital evaluation group meeting
 - Report any conflict of interest.
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2. Review period 1



The first review period lasts from the time you get access to the applications to be reviewed by you in Prisma, until approximately 10–14 days before the review panel meeting. During this period, you shall read the applications allocated to you, write evaluations (assessment or preliminary statement), and grade the applications. Thereafter, Prisma is closed for editing, at the same time as the system opens for reading, so that you can prepare for the discussions held at the review panel meeting by reading the assessments by the other reviewers.

Individual evaluation

Each application shall be reviewed and graded by at least three members of the review panel; one rapporteur and two further reviewers. For the applications where you are the rapporteur, you shall write a *preliminary statement*, which shall consist of a numerical grade and written comments on all evaluation criteria, where the strengths and weaknesses of the project are pointed out. In the role as reviewer, you shall write an *assessment*, which shall also consist of a numerical grade and written comments, but here the comments do not have to be as detailed. This work shall be carried out in Prisma. At this stage, the written preliminary statements and assessments primarily have a guiding function for the discussions during the spring meeting. For that reason, you may write the text in bullet points. The applications that will not go further to the autumn meeting receive the individual grades and a standard final statement. These final statements are handled by the Research Council’s personnel.

Your review shall be based on the application contents. Information that is irrelevant to the review should not be used. Irrelevant information can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from expertise in the field. Examples of irrelevant information are details of an applicant’s private life, and various types of rumours, such as a lack of research ethics or assumptions that someone else might have written the application.

The content of an application and information about an applicant shall not be shared with others during the review process. Sometimes questions arise whether it is acceptable to consult with a colleague on certain parts of the content of a research plan. This may be justified as long as the application is not shared with third parties, and the consultation is limited to specific questions, such as the use of statistics or new research findings. It is your task as a reviewer to assess the application in its entirety.

Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct. The Swedish Research Council will ensure that the matter is further investigated.

Evaluation criteria and grading scales

Your review shall be based on four evaluation criteria – the scientific quality of the proposed research, novelty and originality, the merits of the applicant, and the feasibility of the project. The criteria are evaluated against a seven- or three-point grading scale (as detailed below), and are intended to reflect the application’s “quality profile”. To facilitate the evaluation of

the various criteria, there are also a number of guiding questions to be considered in the evaluation work.

Please observe that the grading scale is an ordinal scale, where it is not possible to specify differences or distances between the values.

Guiding questions

The scientific quality of the proposed research

Strengths and weaknesses of the project's question and methodology, including potential for future scientific activities.

- To what extent are the design of the project and its questions of the highest scientific quality?
- To what extent is the project description sufficiently clear and systematic, for example in its definition of the research problem, its theoretical basis, and the summary of previous results within the research area?
- To what extent is the proposed research design suitable for achieving the aims of the project?
- To what extent are the methods for any data collection and analysis well described and suitable?
- To what extent is the project relevant for knowledge about civil society?

Novelty and originality

- To what extent does the project have the potential to increase knowledge of civil society in a significant way? (Examples are new concepts and theories, approaches and methods, and/or new data.)
- To what extent does the project show a clear progression and new thinking in relation to previous research?
- What potential does the project have for scientific and societal impact?

The merits of the applicant

The merits of the applicant are always evaluated in relation to the applicant's career age and to the research task.

- To what extent do the project participants have sufficient research experience and expertise within the area the application relates to?
- To what extent have the project participants displayed an ability for independent and creative scientific work?
- How good are the project participants' scientific production, impact and other merits in a national and international perspective, in relation to the research area and the applicant's career age?
- To what extent do the project participants have the relevant and supplementary competence required to carry out the research task?
- To what extent does the applicant (in the event the application includes doctoral students) have any experience of supervising doctoral students?

A seven-grade scale is used to evaluate the criteria novelty and originality, the scientific quality of the project and the merits of the applicant:

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

Feasibility

- To what extent are the project's staffing, work allocation and time plan realistic?
- Is there access to materials, equipment, research infrastructures and other resources required for the implementation of the project?
- Have the permits required to implement the project been obtained? If not, please state how such permits are being applied for, and how likely it is that these permits will be obtained.

A three-grade scale is used for grading feasibility:

Feasible	3
Partly feasible	2
Not feasible	1

For all criteria, you can also mark "Insufficient"/0, if you consider that the application lacks sufficient information to allow a reasonable evaluation to be made of the criterion. Do not use this mark to signal that the application is not within your own field of research, and therefore hard to grade.

Overall grade

Finally, you shall weigh together the various subsidiary criteria into an overall grade according to the seven-grade scale above. The overall grade is not the same as an average grade or a summary of the subsidiary evaluations; instead, it shall reflect the scientific quality of the application as whole. It is not a condition that the quality concept covers all aspects of the various criteria, nor that they have the same relative weight for all applications. In normal

cases, however, a strongly positive evaluation of only one criterion cannot outweigh other weaknesses of an application when weighed together.

External reviewers

The review panel chair shall identify applications that require external review, and shall propose, in consultation with the review panel members, reviewers to be used. External review may come into question if the scientific character of an application means that the joint competency of the review panel is not sufficient for a thorough review, or if an application is difficult to evaluate due to conflicts of interest within the review panel. It is important that no applicant is disadvantaged by his or her project being multidisciplinary or not falling squarely within the core areas of any review panel. In normal cases, the responsible research officer at the Research Council will contact the external reviewers proposed by the panel.

Summary of your tasks

- Grade and write comments (preliminary statement) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur.
 - Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer.
 - Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur.
 - Prepare a suggestion of sub- and overall grades for all applications for which you are a reviewer. The grades should be based on the other panel members' comments.
 - Contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and the chair if you discover during the review that you do, after all, have a conflict of interest with any of the applications you are to review, or if you discover any problem with an application.
 - Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviations from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.
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3. Review panel's spring meeting



At the review panel's spring meeting, the applications are reported on and discussed, using the grading done by you and the other panel members ahead of the meeting as the starting point. The review panel shall then arrive at a joint overall grade for each application, and decide which applications will be taken forward to the next review stage. For the applications that will not go to the next step you shall also decide on the individual grades for each subsidiary criteria.

Discussion on applications

The applications are discussed based on the individual review carried out before the meeting, and considering the four subsidiary criteria used in the review. The chair leads the discussion of an application, which as a rule starts with the rapporteur presenting the strengths and weaknesses of the application, followed by the other reviewers of the application giving their assessment. The chair is responsible for including any assessments from external reviewers in the discussion. For each application discussed at the meeting, the panel shall agree on an overall grade. For the applications will not be taken forward to the next review stage, the panel should also agree on sub grades. The reviewers of an application should prepare for the discussion by reading the assessments and grades given by the other reviewers for the applications.

During the panel meeting, the group shall ensure that the sex and gender perspectives are included in the assessment of the perspectives that are applicable in the applications.

The review panel has equal responsibility for each application reviewed by the panel, and each one shall be evaluated based on its own merits. Irrelevant information shall not be discussed. At the same time, the panel's applications shall compete with each other on equal terms. No application may therefore be given a higher or lower grade because it belongs within a certain subject area. Nor shall the panel carry out any quota-based allocation between the scientific disciplines included in the panel.

It is also important that an application/applicant receives a new assessment each time of applying, and that all applications are assessed in the same way. For this reason, the review panel will not have access to any previous applications or assessments.

It is a good idea to be aware of that the meeting time is limited, and that many applications have to be discussed within that time. It is therefore important to try to find a balance in the time allocated to each application. The chair and the Research Council personnel shall keep track of the time.

If you discover any possible conflict of interest (your own or another's) during the meeting, please bring this up with the chair and the Research Council in private, and not in front of the entire panel.

Deciding on which applications will be taken forward to the next review stage

At the spring meeting, the most important task of the review panel is to identify the applications that are assessed as unlikely to receive funding, hence not be taken forward to the next review stage for further review. Once all applications have been discussed and the panel has agreed on an overall grade for each application, the panel shall carry out a preliminary ranking of the applications based on the overall grades. The chair shall identify a cut-off point on the list, where the applications below have received such low grading that it is not reasonable to assume that the application will be awarded funding. Applications that are borderline or where the panel does not agree shall be discussed further until the panel has reached a joint view on which applications should go through to stage two. All applications that for some reason have not been fully evaluated, for example because of an external review has not been received in time, or because of a reviewer is ill, must be taken forward to stage two. A rule of thumb is that 25–35 per cent of the applications shall go forward to stage two. If the number of applications in the review panel is very high (clearly above 100), it is recommended to set a ceiling at around 30 applications. It is not necessary to draw up a ranking order for the applications that will not go to the next step. Those applications will be formally rejected when the Scientific Council has reached its funding decision at the decision meeting, which is usually held in October.

Summary of the tasks of the review panel

- Agree on an overall grade for each application discussed.
 - Agree on a proposal for which applications to take forward to stage two.
 - Agree on the individual grades for the applications that will not be taken forward to the next review stage.
-

4. Review period 2



The second review period lasts from the review panel's spring meeting until approximately 10–14 days before the review panel's autumn meeting. During this period, as a panel member you shall read all the applications taken forward from stage one, with the exception of those where you have a conflict of interest, write evaluations (assessment or preliminary statement), and grade the applications reviewed by you. Your task as reviewer also includes evaluating the budgets of all applications, and preparing a proposal for grant amounts for the applications for which you are the rapporteur, and bring to the meeting.

Thereafter, Prisma is closed for editing, at the same time as the system opens for reading, so that you can prepare as panel member for the discussions held at the review panel meeting by reading the assessments by the other reviewers.

Individual evaluation

In stage two, each application shall be evaluated and graded by all. The evaluation shall be conducted as in stage one (see Section 2. Review period 1 for more detailed instructions). For the applications where you are the rapporteur, you shall write a *preliminary statement*, which shall consist of a numerical grade and detailed written comments on all evaluation criteria, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the project described. In the role as a reviewer, you shall write an *assessment*, which shall also consist of a numerical grade and written comments, but here the comments do not have to be as detailed. It is important that you review and as necessary update your grading and comments of the applications you have already read and graded ahead of the spring meeting. This work shall be carried out in Prisma.

Evaluation criteria and grading scales

In your evaluation, you shall use the Swedish Research Council's four basic criteria for evaluating quality as the starting point, and consider the guiding questions, just as during the first review period (see Section 2. Review period 1).

Assessment of project budgets

As a rapporteur, it is your task to propose a grant amount to award for the applications at of the review panel's autumn meeting. At this meeting, the review panel will discuss the budget based on your proposal, and agree on an amount to award. The proposal is presented during the panel meeting with the help of a prepared documentation that you bring with you. The proposal is presented as a total amount (in even thousands SEK) for the project, and in number of years. You shall also assess the budget for the other applications, so that you can agree to or propose changes to the rapporteur's proposal at the meeting.

The guiding principle for your assessment of a project budget is that the budget shall be sufficient to conduct the research proposed in the application. The assessment shall include costs for salaries, premises, operating costs and depreciation of equipment, and other costs that the applicant has indicated. All items should be justified in order to facilitate the

assessment. In particular, consider whether there are elements in the budget that stand out, such as unreasonable or unjustified costs.

Evaluate also whether the activity level of the project participants is reasonable in relation to the research task. The Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences does not usually fund researchers in full. A specific guideline that applies to doctoral students is that they are funded to a maximum of 75% of a full-time equivalent over four years, or 100% over three years.

You shall not weigh in the level of indirect costs in your assessment. Please note that the assessment of the budget shall be separate from the evaluation of the scientific quality of the project.

Instructions for budget calculation and budget discussion in the evaluation groups

The budget discussion in the evaluation group is carried out in two phases. In the first, a budget is proposed for each of the ranked projects (including reserves), based on the following indicative questions:

1. If the application covers four years, is the need for a fourth project obvious and well justified?
2. If not, what is the budgeted amount for year 4 as indicated in the table Total budget?
3. Are there other major budget items (comprising at least SEK 100,000) in the application that are clearly unnecessary or of an unreasonable extent?
4. What is the total amount that should be deducted under question 3? Calculate how much the budget can be cut by adding the sums under 2 and 4.
5. Calculate the project budget: Applied amount minus the amount under point 5.
6. The calculations according to steps 1-6 are made by the rapporteur for each project to be discussed at the autumn meeting. This must be done before the autumn meeting and not during the sitting meeting.

In a second phase, it is examined whether the highest-ranked project on the reserve list can be financed if the budget for the projects proposed for financing is reduced somewhat. In such cases, cuts can be made with the same percentage for each of the projects proposed for financing. Such cuts may not cover more than 10% of the remaining project budget after steps 1-6 above. Considerations in this phase are made by the evaluation group as a whole.

Summary of your tasks

- Grade and write detailed comments (preliminary statement) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur. If necessary, update your rating and comments for the applications that you have read and rated already before the spring meeting.
 - Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer. If necessary, update your rating and comments for the applications that you have read and rated already before the spring meeting.
 - Prepare for the meeting by make proposals for the project budget to award for all applications for which you are the rapporteur (see Instructions for budget calculation and budget discussion in the evaluation groups). The budget proposal is presented at the meeting.
 - Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur.
 - Contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and the chair if you discover during the review that you do, after all, have a conflict of interest with any of the applications you are to review, or if you discover any problem with an application.
 - Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.
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5. Autumn meeting



At the review panel's autumn meeting, the applications are reported on and discussed, using the grading done by you and the other panel members ahead of the meeting as the starting point. At the autumn meeting, the review panel shall then work out a joint grade for the subsidiary criteria of each application, and an overall grade for scientific quality. The panel shall also draw up a priority list with the applications recommended for funding within the given budgetary framework and a number of reserves, and agree on the proposed budgets for the applications. During the meeting, panel members are also encouraged to provide feedback on the review process.

Discussion on applications

The applications are discussed based on the individual review carried out before the meeting considering the four subsidiary criteria used in the review. The chair leads the discussion of an application, which as a rule starts with the rapporteur presenting the strengths and weaknesses of the application, followed by the other reviewers of the application giving their assessment. 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 for each application shall make notes ahead of the task of formulating the panel's final statement. You should prepare for the discussion by reading the other panel members' assessments and grades for all the applications where you do not have a conflict of interest.

During the panel meeting, the group shall ensure that the sex and gender perspectives are included in the assessment of the perspectives that are applicable in the applications.

The review panel has equal responsibility for each application reviewed by the panel, and each one shall be evaluated based on its own merits. Irrelevant information shall not be discussed. At the same time, the panel's applications shall compete with each other on equal terms. No application may therefore be given a higher or lower grade because it belongs within a certain subject area. Nor shall the panel carry out any quota-based allocation between the scientific disciplines included in the panel.

It is also important that an application/applicant receive a new assessment each time of applying, and that all applications are assessed in the same way. For this reason, the review panel will not have access to any previous applications or assessments.

If you discover any possible conflict of interest (your own or another's) during the meeting, please bring this up with the chair and the Research Council in private, and not in front of the entire panel.

Prioritising

Once all applications have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on an overall grade for each application, the panel shall carry out a prioritisation of the applications with the highest scientific quality. This prioritisation shall conclude with the review panel's proposal for applications to be funded within the panel's budgetary framework. The prioritisation list shall

also include a number of reserves, covering the applications that fall immediately outside the panel's budget framework. Reserves are necessary, as it happens that project leaders cannot accept their grants.

Special conditions

The Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences has established that gender equality shall be used as a boundary condition for prioritising applications of equivalent scientific quality. This means that in conjunction with the overall prioritisation, the review panel shall consider the success rate of women and men, and as necessary prioritise applications from applicants of the under-represented gender when applications are deemed to be of equivalent quality. The boundary condition shall not be applied by individual reviewers in their work ahead of the review panel meeting. The boundary condition that affects the prioritisation but is not part of the evaluation of scientific quality shall not be weighed into the grading.

Proposal for budget

The review panel as a whole is responsible for the evaluation and proposal for budget for each application. At the meeting, the panel shall agree on a proposed grant amount to award to each prioritised application. The budget discussion goes hand in hand with the prioritisation discussion, as the number of applications that can be prioritised within the review panel's budget framework is dependent on the proposed project budgets.

The rapporteur opens the budget discussion with his or her proposal, and a justification for the proposal. The review panel then discusses the budget and agrees on a reasonable project budget range. Please note that the assessment of the project costs should not affect the evaluation of the scientific quality of the project.

Feedback

In conjunction with the review panel meeting, the panel is encouraged to provide feedback on the review work carried out, by commenting in the various aspects of the process. This is usually a concluding item on the meeting agenda.

Summary of the tasks of the review panel

- 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 priority list with reserves.
 - Agree on an amount to award each prioritised application.
 - Contribute with feedback on the review process.
-

6. Final statement



Immediately after the review panel meeting, you write the panel's final statement on the applications for which you are the rapporteur. It is then the task of the chair to scrutinise the final statements and take responsibility for ensuring they reflect the discussion by the review panel. As rapporteur, you may be asked to supplement the final statement in this conjunction.

The rapporteur writes the final statement

The discussion at the review panel meeting forms the basis for the review panel's final statement, which is the end product of the review process for an application. The Swedish Research Council bases its funding decision on the review panel's final statement in the matter, and the final statement is also sent to the applicant in conjunction with the publication of the grant decision. The final statement is therefore a central document, and it is important that the final statement corresponds to the grades, and describes objectively the main strengths and weaknesses of the application, and also includes any necessary clarification.

You are responsible for writing final statements on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. The preliminary statement you have entered into Prisma ahead of the review panel meeting may form the basis for the final statement. The preliminary statement shall, however, be modified to reflect the review panel's joint overall evaluation of the application. You should therefore go back over your notes of what was discussed at the meeting and ensure that the final statement reflects the panel's joint evaluation. As rapporteur, you usually have one week in which to enter your final statements in Prisma following the end of the review panel meeting.

Only those applications that have been the subject of discussion at the review panel's autumn meeting shall receive a full final statement. The other applications will receive the overall grade, individual grades and a standard final statement. These final statements are handled by the Research Council's personnel.

The chair reviews all final statements

Once the final statements have been entered into Prisma, the chair and the senior research officer read through them. 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. It is not the task of the chair to carry out comprehensive editing. As a panel member, you may therefore be asked, in conjunction with the chair's review, to supplement or adjust a final statement.

General advice and recommendations on final statements

When completing the final statements for which you are responsible, you should consider the following:

You must

- **focus on describing the main strengths and weaknesses of the application.** Try to highlight conceptual, structural and/or methodological issues in the way they were discussed at the review panel meeting.
- **ensure the written justifications correspond to the grading.** It is a good idea to use the grading scale definitions in your written comments (Outstanding, Excellent, Very good to excellent, Very good, Good, Weak and Poor). For example, if an application gets the grade 4, the justification should include both strengths and minor weaknesses, according to the definition of this grade.
- **consider the guiding questions** for the evaluation criteria when you formulate the final statement.
- **write concisely, but not too briefly.** The content rather than the length of the text is of significance. Too short a justification may counteract its purpose, which is to help the applicant understand the grounds for the evaluation.
- comment on if any divergence from the general instructions for the application have been weighed into the evaluation of the application.
- be constructive and factual in your comments.
- write the statement in Swedish or in English.
- clarify which parts of the project that are considered worth funding, if the review panel recommends that only parts of a project are funded.

You must not

- make a long summary of the contents of the application or the competence of the applicant. Focus on the evaluation of the application, and not on a description of the project.
- state any individual comments (such as “I think...” or “In my opinion...”). The statement shall constitute the joint evaluation by the review panel.
- state any quantifiable data, such as exact number of publications, or bibliometric measurements.
- state any personal information about the applicant (such as gender or age).
- state any recommendation whether to refuse or grant an application.
- make any comment stating that an application does not belong to or is suitable for the review panel, or for the Swedish Research Council. The review panel is obliged to evaluate all applications reviewed within the panel.

Summary of your tasks

-
- Write the review panel’s final statement in Prisma on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. The final statement shall reflect the entire review panels discussion, and be entered into Prisma no later than one week after the review panel meeting.
 - As necessary, supplement final statements following review by the chair.
 - Submit receipts for any expenses to the panel’s research officer.
-

7. Decision and follow-up



The final step in the process is the grant decision. The Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences decides on the applications to be awarded or refused, based on the review panels' proposals. Following each review process, an internal follow-up is also carried out of the process and the outcome.

Decision

The Board of the Swedish Research Council has delegated the decision on project grants within Humanities and Social Sciences to the Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences. The Scientific Council's decision is based on the priority lists (including reserves) of the review panels and the redistribution panel, any justifications for the lists from the chairs and the review panels' final statements. The decision is then published shortly after the decision on vr.se and in Prisma, and the applicants are also informed of the outcome in this conjunction.

Follow-up

Following each completed review process, an internal follow-up of the process and the outcome is carried out. An important starting point for this follow-up is the feedback you provide as a panel member in conjunction with the review panel meeting. The review panel chair also has the task of writing a report on the experiences from the year's review work. The chair shall write the report in consultation with the observer, and with support from the Swedish Research Council personnel. The panel chairs are provided a template for the report that they should follow. The research officer will send the template to the chair ahead of the review panel's autumn meeting. Following the grant decisions, the research officer will also deliver the overall statistics for the year's review, which shall be part of the report. The chair shall complete the report ahead of the Scientific Council's December meeting. In addition to feedback from the review panel and the report from the chair, statistics of various kinds are produced.

Complaints and questions

If you as a panel member receive any question about the evaluation of an individual application, you must refer this to the Swedish Research Council's personnel. All complaints or wishes about clarification shall be registered and then handled by the Secretary General responsible in consultation with the chair and senior research officer of the review panel. The chair may contact you as a panel member as necessary in this conjunction.

Summary of your tasks

- Refer any questions about the evaluation of individual applications to the Swedish Research Council's personnel.
 - Be prepared to assist the chair and the Secretary General responsible in the event of any questions.
-

8. Checklist

Below is a summary of the various tasks you have during the different stages of the process.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> State account information in Prisma. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare and evaluate your conditions for a digital evaluation group meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Report any conflict of interest.
<hr/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Grade and write comments (preliminary statement) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur. <input type="checkbox"/> Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare a suggestion of sub- and overall grades for all applications for which you are a reviewer. The grades should be based on the other panel members' comments. <input type="checkbox"/> Contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and the chair if you discover during the review that you do, after all, have a conflict of interest with any of the applications you are to review, or if you discover any problem with an application. <input type="checkbox"/> Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.
<hr/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Agree on overall grades for each application discussed <input type="checkbox"/> Agree on a proposal for which applications to take forward to stage two. <input type="checkbox"/> Agree on the individual grades for the applications that will not go further to stage 2.
<hr/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Grade and write detailed comments (preliminary statement) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur. If necessary, update your rating and comments for the applications that you have read and rated already before the spring meeting. <input type="checkbox"/> Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer. If necessary, update your rating and comments for the applications that you have read and rated already before the spring meeting. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for the meeting by make proposals for the project budget to award for all applications for which you are the rapporteur (see Instructions for budget calculation and budget discussion in the evaluation groups). The budget proposal is presented at the meeting.

-
- Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur.
 - Contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and the chair if you discover during the review that you do, after all, have a conflict of interest with any of the applications you are to review, or if you discover any problem with an application.
 - Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.
-



Autumn meeting

- Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for each application evaluated in stage two.
 - Agree on a proposal for the applications to be awarded funding within the review panel's budgetary framework.
 - Agree on a priority list with reserves.
 - Agree on a proposed amount to award to each prioritised application.
 - Contribute with feedback on the review process.
-



Final statement

- Write the review panel's final statement in Prisma on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. The final statement shall be entered into Prisma no later than one week after the review panel meeting (see Prisma for the exact date).
 - As necessary, supplement final statements following review by the chair
 - Submit receipts for any expenses to the panel's research officer.
-



Decision and follow-up

- Refer any questions about the evaluation of individual applications to the Swedish Research Council's personnel.
 - Be prepared to assist the chair and the Secretary General responsible in the event of any questions.
-

Appendix 1:

The Swedish Research Council's principles and guidelines for peer review

The Board of the Swedish Research Council has adopted eight principles for peer review at the Swedish Research Council. The purpose of the principles is to provide a basis for safeguarding the scientific assessment, based on clear quality criteria with competent reviewers, within the framework of a sound peer review culture and good research practice. This document contains guidelines for the Swedish Research Council's peer review. The guidelines are based on the eight principles, and provide concrete guidelines for how the principles for peer review shall be complied with. The guidelines relate to peer review of research funding.

The guidelines for peer review of applications fall under the principles and under the brief preambles adopted by the Board, where the principles are clarified. The principles are numbered from 1 to 8. It should, however, be noted that when applying a guideline, several principles may need to be considered. The Board's decision to adopt the principles states clearly that: "The principles should be read together. They may conflict with each other and therefore need to be balanced against each other. How the principles are balanced against each other must be discussed in each individual case. Implementing the principles in practice needs to be the subject of an ongoing discussion. The principles should therefore be recurrently raised in the review work."

While they are general, there is room for variation justified by factors such as differences between calls and/or research areas, or variation justified by testing new ways of working. This means that different guidelines differ in character to some extent. Some guidelines consist mostly of clarifications of legislation or other mandatory regulations, or follow from requirements for the review work adopted by the Board. These guidelines must be complied with, and follow-up should be carried out in the event deviations from such guidelines are nevertheless noted. Other guidelines are of the character "comply or explain". A further type of guideline states that the person responsible for each call or area shall formulate instructions or justify choices made specifically for a call or a subject area.

The three types of guidelines are differentiated using terminology. In the first case, the word "*shall*" is part of the wording of the guideline. In the second case, the word "*should*" is used. In the third case, the guidelines state that the person responsible for the call shall formulate instructions for, or specifically justify aspects of the peer review.

The guidelines are currently in the process of being implemented, which means that some measures based on these have been implemented, while other guidelines will be implemented in the future.

The Swedish Research Council's Principles for Peer Review and Guidelines for Peer Review of Research Funding

Excerpt from the Board Minutes dated 15 November 2015.

1. Expertise in the review

The assessment of applications shall be carried out by reviewers with documented high scientific¹ competence within the research area or areas or the subject area or areas to which the application relates and the scientific review shall be based on clear quality criteria. Reviewers shall be appointed according to clear criteria in a systematically documented process.

Guidelines:

1. The Swedish Research Council's peer review shall be conducted with the help of review panels with broad and deep scientific expertise of relevance to the grant format to be reviewed.
2. Review panel meetings shall constitute a central feature of the review.
3. Scientific assessment and prioritising of applications should be separated from decisions on grants.
4. Expertise is required to recruit review panel members and external reviewers.
5. For each call, there shall be documented instructions for:
 - who is recruiting,
 - what merits shall be represented on the review panel,
 - any requirements on the composition of the review panel, such as subject area competency, limits on the number of members and gradual replacement of members between calls for the same grant format,
 - percentage of international members of the review panel.
6. The maximum mandate period for a review panel member shall be six years on the same review panel. After this, a qualifying period of minimum three years shall apply.
7. The maximum period as chair is three years, as part of the overall mandate period of six years on a review panel. After this, a qualifying period of minimum three years shall apply.
8. Review panels shall comply with the Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy and have numerical equality (i.e. minimum 40% of each gender).
9. Appointments to review panels shall comply with the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy.

2. Objectivity and equal treatment

All evaluations shall be made in an equivalent manner and be based on the quality of the planned and executed research and on the merits of the applicant, irrespective of the applicant's origin or identity. To avoid any conflict of interest or partiality, reviews shall be based on clear quality criteria and formalised processes.

¹ Or artistic competence when relevant.

Guidelines:

1. Ahead of each call, instructions shall be drawn up for the grading criteria to be applied and prioritised. The application and prioritising between grading criteria shall be reflected in the instructions for completing an application.
2. The instructions for the project plan, CV and publication list shall be designed to optimise the documentation for review within each research area and grant format.
3. Bibliometric data shall be used restrictively in the review, and only as part of an overall assessment of merit carried out by experts within the area in question. The bibliometrics imported in conjunction with the application shall be relevant to the research area and the grant format applicable to the call.
4. The documentation for assessment shall consist of the application, which is reviewed using the subject experts' scientific competency and judgment. Information that is not relevant to the assessment shall not be used.
5. The assessment criteria shall be defined through guiding questions, so that it is clear what is to be assessed. The assessment criteria decided by the Director-General shall always be used, and additional criteria and guiding questions shall be adapted to each research area and grant format.
6. All assessments shall comply with the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy.

3. Ethical considerations

The assessment assumes an ethical approach and high level of integrity. The subject experts shall not carry out any preliminary ethical review, but should take into account how the applicant discusses the research and formulates the research question with regard to good research practice. If an application includes research that clearly breaches ethical rules and/or clearly contravenes Swedish or international law, this should be reflected in the assessment of the quality and/or feasibility of the research.

Guidelines:

1. There shall be clear instructions for how applicants shall account for and subject experts shall assess the description of which ethical considerations are relevant to the research project in question, and whether the research project may entail potential risks to humans or the natural environment.
2. The assessment shall pay attention to the requirement for ethical review of research relating to humans or animals.
3. Instructions shall be drawn up in conjunction with the call for how divergences from ethical guidelines and good research practice as well as dishonesty in research shall be managed in the peer review, and how such divergences shall impact on the assessment.

4. Openness and transparency

The assessment shall be based on and justified by the documentation requested by the Swedish Research Council, which in a typical case is an application for grant funding. The assessment of the documentation shall be made based on rules and guidelines set in advance and publicly known.

Guidelines:

1. All steps in the review process shall be known to the applicants, the reviewers and other researchers.
2. Information on the members of the review panel should be publicly available before the call in question opens.
3. The subject experts shall base their assessment on the current application and not have access to previous assessments, and should only exceptionally refer to previous applications. In the event the review process requires access to previous applications, this shall be made clear in the instructions for the call in question.
4. For each call, there shall be instructions for how statements should be written and what they should include.

5. Appropriateness for purpose

The peer review process shall be adapted to the call and the research area, and shall be proportional to the size and complexity of the call without neglecting the rule of law.

Guidelines:

1. At least three members shall read each application ahead of the review panel's joint prioritising.
2. When deciding on the composition of the review panel, the adaptation of the group to the nature of the task and the number of applications the panel has to assess shall be justified.
3. For each call where applicable, there shall be instructions for how applications are sifted.
4. There shall be instructions for how consultation or external reviewers shall be used in the assessment.

6. Efficiency

The total resources used in the application and assessment, in terms of both time used and cost shall be minimised for all involved, i.e. applicants, subject experts and Swedish Research Council personnel, with consideration for maintaining quality, objectivity, transparency and appropriateness for purpose.

Guidelines:

1. For each decision about a call or review, consideration shall be paid to what can be done in order to minimise the time taken and resources used (for applicants, review panel members, external subject experts and Swedish Research Council personnel) during the process from call to decision.
2. The call, application and review processes shall be predictable and changes to the process shall be implemented with a long-term perspective.

7. Integrity

All participants in the assessment process shall respect the integrity of the process and shall not disclose to any third party what has been discussed at the meeting or the opinion of other reviewers in the ongoing processing of applications. The final assessment shall always be documented and published once a decision has been made.

Guidelines:

1. The review work shall be carried out with great integrity. Reviewers shall not have contacts with individual applicants regarding the application or the review, either during or after the review process.
2. All communications with applicants and the Swedish Research Council concerning the review process, including the grounds on which decisions are made, shall be carried out via the personnel responsible at the Swedish Research Council.
3. There shall be instructions for how reviewers shall deal with problems in reviewing parts of the subject content of an application.

8. The expert assessment shall be prepared and followed up in a structured manner.

Review processes and reviewers shall be prepared and followed up according to clear criteria. All reviewers shall have access to the same type of background documentation for the review.

Guidelines:

1. Review panel members and the review panel chair, as well as other subject experts, shall receive training at an early stage of the review process in:
 - how the assessment shall be made and what is to be assessed,
 - application of conflict of interest rules and the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy,
 - the application of the Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy in the review of applications,
 - how prejudices can affect opinions,
 - good research practice and ethical considerations,
 - how statements shall be worded, rules for communication between subject experts and between subject experts and applicants,
 - the chair shall also receive training in all the stages of the review, including recruitment practices and the design and group dynamics of the review panel meeting.
2. There shall be job descriptions for the chair, panel members and observers (if any participate).
3. The peer review shall always be followed up in a systematic way in order to continuously improve the review processes.
4. The follow-up of a call shall include the overall number of persons asked to participate in a review panel and, as applicable, as external subject experts, and a summary description of the reasons given for why members and external subject experts have declined.
5. There shall be instructions relating to the management of feedback and complaints from applicants.

Appendix 2: The Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy (1) and guidelines for the management of conflicts of interest (2)

Part 1: The Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy²

- Reg. No: 1.2.4-2019-00077

According to the constitutional objectivity principle, the Swedish Research Council shall observe objectivity and impartiality, and respect everybody's equality before the law. The administrative Procedure Act (Förvaltningslagen SFS 2017:900) contains conflict of interest provisions (disqualifications) aimed at guaranteeing the impact of the principle. This conflict of interest policy has been drawn up to ensure the Swedish Research Council lives up to these legal requirements and to prevent representatives of the Council from having conflicts of interest where the objectivity of the representatives may be questioned.³

The following applies at the Swedish Research Council:

- All forms of participation in the handling of matters at the Swedish Research Council shall be characterised by objectivity and impartiality.
- The Swedish Research Council shall work actively and continuously to ensure the Swedish Research Council's representatives do not end up in conflicts of interest that may cause the objectivity of the representatives or the trust in the Swedish Research Council to be questioned.
- The Swedish Research Council shall manage conflict of interest situations arising according to applicable law.
- The Swedish Research Council shall decide on guidelines for managing conflicts of interest. The guidelines shall be followed up and evaluated continuously.
- The Swedish Research Council shall work to ensure all persons representing the Swedish Research Council have good knowledge about conflict of interest issues, and have read and understood the conflict of interest policy and the guidelines for managing conflicts of interest.

² This is a translation of the adopted Swedish version of the conflict of interest policy. In the event of conflict between the Swedish version and this English version, the former shall take precedence.

³ Representatives of the Swedish Research Council refers to the Council's employees, appointed reviewers and elected members of the board, scientific councils, councils and committees.

- Conflict of interest issues shall be communicated and discussed on an ongoing basis within the operation.
- Responsibility for ensuring compliance with the conflict of interest policy and the guidelines for managing conflicts of interest lies with the Swedish Research Council and all who take part in the handling of the Swedish Research Council's matters. This means that the Swedish Research Council's employees, appointed reviewers and elected members shall know and follow the conflict of interest policy and the guidelines for managing conflicts of interest.

This conflict of interest policy was adopted by the Board of the Swedish Research Council on 30 January 2019 and is valid until further notice. The policy replaces previously adopted conflict of interest policies in their entirety.

Part 2:

The Swedish Research Council's guidelines for managing conflicts of interest⁴

- Reg. No:1.2.4-2019-00139

1. Starting points

A characteristic of the organisation and decision-making formats of the Swedish Research Council is that the majority of the members in the Council's decision-making and reviewing bodies are active researchers and part of the research community, which in turn is directly affected by the Council's allocation of research funds.

The handling of matters relating to research funds include a number of steps that can potentially affect the outcome of the matters. Among these are the control of formal requirements, decisions to screen out applications, the distribution of applications among the review panels and reviewers, assessments made by individual reviewers and by the review panels, decisions to approve or reject applications and the implementation of decisions.

The Swedish Research Council also carries out evaluations, appoints representatives to external bodies, carries out strategic work, responds to referrals and consultations and participates in communication activities. The Council also works on a daily basis on issues relating to direction and coordination, finance, personnel administration, IT, law, archiving and registration and operational support.

Issues regarding conflicts of interest may arise in all types of matters occurring at the Swedish Research Council. According to the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy, the Council shall itself decide on guidelines for the management of conflicts of interest. The following guidelines aim to realise the conflict of interest policy, and shall constitute support in the handling of matters at the Swedish Research Council. In addition to the guidelines, there are also specific control documents for conflicts of interest in certain types of matters.

2. Legal provisions regulating conflicts of interest

Provisions regulating disqualifying conflicts of interest can be found in Sections 16–18 of the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act, (Förvaltningslagen, SFS 2017:900, "FL"). In its capacity as an administrative government agency, the Swedish Research Council shall comply with these provisions when handling matters.

Various conflict of interest situations (Section 16 FL)

⁴ This is a translation of the adopted Swedish version of the conflict of interest policy. In the event of conflict between the Swedish version and this English version, the former shall take precedence.

The act states that persons who take part on behalf of a public agency in handling in a way that may affect the agency's decision in a matter has a disqualifying conflict of interest in situations such as the following:

- If he or she or any closely related person is party to the matter, or otherwise can be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent
- If he or she or any closely related person is or has been the representative or agent for a party to the matter, or for anyone else who can be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent
- If there is any other specific circumstance that means his or her impartiality in the matter can be questioned.

Only if it is clear that the issue of impartiality lacks any importance shall the agency disregard any disqualifying conflict of interest. It must then be a question of matters where the person who will be part of the handling lacks any opportunity to influence or become influenced by any irrelevant circumstances, such as registration matters.

Consequences and managing of conflict of interest (Sections 17–18 FL)

The consequences of a conflict of interest are regulated as follows:

- A person with a disqualifying conflict of interest must not take part in the handling of the matter.
- A person with a disqualifying conflict of interest must not be present when the matter is decided on.
- A person with a disqualifying conflict of interest may, however, carry out such tasks that cannot be carried out by someone else without significant delay of the handling.

The managing of conflict of interest is regulated as follows:

- A person who is aware of a circumstance that could be assumed to cause him or her to have a disqualifying conflict of interest is obliged to report this immediately to the agency.
- The agency shall examine issues regarding conflict of interest as soon as possible.
- The person who has a disqualifying conflict of interest may take part in the examination of the issue of conflict only if this is required for the agency to be competent to act and any replacement cannot be called in without delaying the examination significantly.

3. Preventing conflict of interest situations

The following applies in order to prevent disqualifying conflict of interest situations at the Swedish Research Council.

Information on conflict of interest circumstances

- A person who is aware of any circumstance that may mean he or she has a disqualifying conflict of interest shall voluntarily and immediately inform the Swedish Research Council of this circumstance.

- Employees of the Swedish Research Council should provide information regarding disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances to their immediate superior. When handling applications for research funding, the information should instead be given to the administrative officer responsible.
- Appointed reviewers and elected review panel members should in the first instance inform about disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances to the administrative officer responsible, and in the second instance to the chair of the review panel, or the chair of the scientific council, council or committee.

Specifically regarding matters relating to applications for research funding

- All who take part in the handling of applications for research funding shall provide information on any disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances relating to applicants and participating researchers listed in an application. In addition, and as far as possible, information should also be provided on disqualifying conflict of interest situations relating to any other person who will participate in the research according to the application.
- Applications should be made available at an early stage to members of the relevant scientific councils, councils and committees and review panels, with a request to report any disqualifying conflicts of interest.
- When review panel members are appointed and when the applications are allocated, conflict of interest issues should be recognised so that disqualifying conflict of interest situations can be avoided.
- Applications for research funding from members of the board, scientific councils, councils and committees and review panels shall not be reviewed by the panel where the member is the chair, a member or an observer. This applies irrespective of whether the member is the applicant or a participating researcher listed in the application.
- When several matters are handled in parallel, for example when a scientific council, council or committee decides on a large number of applications at once on the basis of a list of priorities established by a review panel, potential disqualifying conflicts of interest must be considered as far as possible.

Specifically for cases relating to research infrastructure

- When making decisions to appoint members or delegates to work on research infrastructure issues, any links to national infrastructures and the strategic work on infrastructure issues at administrating organisations shall be considered.

Specifically for cases relating to national and international collaboration

- When making decisions to appoint representatives to external boards and committees and other decision-making or advisory bodies, any disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances shall be considered. This also applies when deciding on an extension to a previously appointed representative's mandate.

4. Assessment of conflicts of interest exists

The following shall be used to support an assessment of whether a disqualifying conflict of interest exists.

An assessment of whether a disqualifying conflict of interest exists shall always be carried out based on the conflict of interest provisions of the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act. The provisions cover all persons who take part in the handling of a matter on behalf of the Swedish Research Council. It is not the position designation or the job description but the actions in the individual matter that determine whether the provisions are applicable. This means that employed administrators, appointed reviewers and elected members are all covered by the provisions when they take part in the handling of matters.

In some situations, disqualifying conflict of interest issues are clear. Examples are when the person taking part in the handling

- is party to the matter
- is closely related to a party
- otherwise can be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent

Other situations may be perceived to be more unclear or difficult to assess. This applies in particular to cases in which one's impartiality in the matter can be questioned, even though the person is not a party, related to a party or can be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent. It is important that all potential conflict of interest situations are handled and assessed based on the circumstances of the individual case, and that the nature, scope and duration of the circumstances that can be assumed to constitute a conflict of interest are considered.

Examples of situations where a disqualifying conflict of interest typically exists

Examples of situations where a disqualifying conflict of interest typically exists are:

- When an economic or other dependency circumstance exists. Examples of the latter are situations where an applicant or participating researcher has an assignment to evaluate the competence, application, department or subject of the person taking part in the handling of the matter.
- When an ongoing or recently terminated close collaboration exists, such as a teacher-student relationship, or a joint research project. The relationship between a doctoral student and his/her supervisor is considered a conflict of interest regardless of how long ago the collaboration occurred.
- When there is evident friendship, enmity or difference of opinion.
- When there is a manager-employee relationship.
- When the person taking part in the handling in another context has handled an issue the matter relates to, for example as a representative of another public agency or organisation.

Examples of situations where there is a risk of a disqualifying conflict of interest

Examples of situations where there is a risk of a disqualifying conflict of interest are:

- When there exists co-authorship of books or articles. As a rule, taking part in the handling of a matter should be avoided where research collaboration and co-authorship has occurred during the last 5 years. A joint article or a joint chapter in an edited book

may be enough to establish co-authorship. Co-authorship that occurred more than 5 years ago can also constitute disqualifying conflict of interest. The determining factor will be whether or not it was the result of close collaboration, and must be assessed from case to case.

- When a person taking part in the handling of a matter belongs to the same institution (particularly small and medium-sized ones) or a similar financially independent entity as an applicant or participant.
- When the nature of a person's involvement in the matter easily arouses suspicion that the basis for impartial assessment is compromised.

5. Management of conflict of interest situations

The following applies for the management of conflict of interest situations at the Swedish Research Council.

All types of matters

- A person with a disqualifying conflict of interest must not be present when the matter is decided on, or otherwise participate in the handling of the matter.
- Conflict of interest situations, both in cases where it exists and where it has been examined and found not to exist, must be documented throughout the handling process.
- If a question of conflict of interest has been raised by an outside party, or if the conflict of interest issue relates to a person who does not consider themselves as having a disqualifying conflict of interest, or differing opinions exist otherwise whether the person has a disqualifying conflict of interest, the examination of the conflict of interest issue shall immediately be passed to the Swedish Research Council for determination.

Specifically for matters relating to applications for research funding

When handling applications for research funding, it is not always possible to prevent conflict of interest situations from arising. This is the case, for example, when a member of a scientific council, council or committee or of the board applies for research funding. In such cases, written statements on the application must be obtained from at least two external experts.

6. Communication and information about conflict of interest issues

As questions and discussions about conflict of interest arise throughout the activities of the Swedish Research Council, all persons taking part in the handling of cases must know and understand the contents of the Council's conflict of interest policy, and the guidelines for handling a conflict of interest. To ensure this, the following applies:

- All employees shall be informed of the conflict of interest policy and the guidelines for the managing conflicts of interest.
- All new employees shall have the opportunity to discuss the meaning of the conflict of interest policy and guidelines as part of their work introduction.
- Administrative officers involved in the review of applications shall be given the opportunity to discuss conflicts of interest and the current procedures for managing such conflicts before and after the application review, in order to raise suggestions for ways to improve the work.

- The conflict of interest policy should be included in the reviewer handbooks.
- The conflict of interest policy and the guidelines shall be communicated to the scientific councils, councils and committees, and to review panel chairs and review panel members.
- The Chief Legal Officer shall have overall responsibility for the Swedish Research Council's management of conflict of interest issues.

Appendix 3: The Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy

Goals for achieving gender equality at the Swedish Research Council

In compliance with its instruction, the Swedish Research Council promotes gender equality throughout its sphere of activities. The strategy for achieving this aim is to strive for gender equality throughout the organisation. Hence, the Swedish Research Council has established the following operational goals:

The Swedish Research Council shall:

1. achieve and maintain an equal gender distribution in its review panels;
2. ensure that the percentages of female and male applicants for grants from the Swedish Research Council correspond to the percentages of women and men among the potential research grant applicants;
3. ensure that women and men have the same success rates⁵ and receive the same average grant amounts, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant⁶;
4. include a gender equality perspective in each analysis and evaluation, where possible;
5. integrate a gender equality perspective in the Research Council's external communication.

The Board has the responsibility for implementation of the Swedish Research Council's strategy. Achieving the goals requires the involvement of the entire agency, including the Scientific Councils and other Councils and Committees (SCCCs)⁷.

Unless otherwise specified, the Director General is responsible for advancing the efforts towards achieving equality.

Introduction

This strategy applies to the Swedish Research Council as a research funding body. A special equal opportunities plan addresses the work of achieving equality within the Swedish Research Council as a public agency.

The primary objective of the Swedish Research Council is to allocate funding to research of the highest scientific quality and that best promotes innovation. Achieving this objective requires impartial assessment of grant applications. Impartial assessment implies gender neutrality; the Swedish Research Council shall support the best researchers, regardless of gender.

⁵Attainment of the goal must of course be assessed in the context of a sufficiently large number of decisions.

⁶Success rates for women and men refer to the percentage of applications approved among total applications received from women and men respectively.

⁷These include the Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences, the Scientific Council for Medicine and Health, the Scientific Council for Natural and Engineering Sciences, the Council for Research Infrastructures, the Educational Sciences Committee, the Committee for Artistic Research, the Committee for Development Research and the Committee for Clinical Treatment Research.

The Swedish Research Council assumes that research capacity exists to the same extent in both sexes. Moreover, the Swedish Research Council assumes that research is benefited when both genders participate and apply their expertise and experience.

Gender equality is also a matter of justice. Women and men should have equal opportunities to conduct research and develop professional careers as researchers.

Achieving gender equality throughout the Swedish Research Council's spheres of activity requires persistent, long-term effort and continuous attention to assure that the ground gained towards equality is not lost. The agency must continually monitor and analyse its activities from an equality perspective and take necessary steps based on the results. The Swedish Research Council should also inform others about its actions in gender equality. Moreover, the Swedish Research Council must consider how the results of gender research might contribute towards improving equality throughout the Research Council's sphere of activity.

Laws, ordinances, and appropriation directions

Equality between women and men is addressed by a body of laws and regulations, such as the Instrument of Government Chapter 1, Section 2, the Discrimination Act (2008:567), the Higher Education Act (1992:1434) and the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100).

The objective of the governmental gender equality policy is that women and men are to have the same power to shape society and their own lives⁴. This overall objective has four interim objectives: (i) equal division of power and influence; (ii) economic equality; (iii) equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care; (iv) men's violence against women must stop. The operations and gender equality strategy of the Swedish Research Council relate primarily to the first two interim objectives.

According to the Swedish Research Council's Instructions Ordinance (2009:975) Section 1 Item 14, the Swedish Research Council must promote equality between women and men within its sphere of activity. In accordance with the requirements established by its government directive, the goals achieved must be presented in the annual reports of the Swedish Research Council.

Processes for achieving goals

The Swedish Research Council must analyse its activities from a perspective of gender equality and follow up on the extent to which the goals have been achieved. This should be done annually in conjunction with the presentation to the Board regarding the outcome of the year's general call and in conjunction with producing the annual report. Equality issues must be discussed by the Board and by other parts of the organisation, and necessary actions must be taken. Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of gender equality must be conducted at the end of the Board's three-year term of office. When a new Board takes office, it must review the gender equality strategy and where necessary decide on changes to the strategy. The following points describe how the operational goals should be achieved.

1.1 Equal gender distribution in Swedish Research Council review panels

"The Swedish Research Council should achieve and maintain an equal gender distribution in its review panels." (Goal 1)

In this context, equal gender distribution is considered to exist in a panel when neither of the sexes comprises less than 40 % of the panel members.

Gender distribution should be considered before appointing review panels, not least with respect to the chair positions. Work involving equality should take a long-term perspective. This means, for example, that in certain areas where women or men are greatly underrepresented among teachers and researchers at higher education institutions, the Swedish Research Council must be observant not to over-utilise those few women or men. If the composition of a review panel, or review panel chair proposed to a Scientific Council, Council or Committee falls outside of the 40 % to 60 % range, this must be specified in the documentation prepared for the decision. This documentation must also include a justification for the deviation and describe the actions taken to achieve an equal gender distribution. Gender equality aspects should also be considered when appointing participants to other groups and when making decisions concerning Swedish Research Council representation on external (national and international) bodies.

2. Grant application rates by women and men

“The Swedish Research Council should ensure that the percentages of female and male applicants for grants from the Swedish Research Council correspond to the percentages of women and men among the potential research grant applicants.” (Goal 2).

Currently, women and men are applying for research grants from the Swedish Research Council at rates corresponding to their proportion in the potential pool of research grant applicants. Should this situation change in the future, the Swedish Research Council would actively recruit more applications from the underrepresented gender.

3. 3. Same success rates for women and men

“The Swedish Research Council should ensure that women and men have the same success rates⁴ and receive the same average size of grants, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant.”⁸ (Goal 3).

Before the Swedish Research Council decides to introduce a new type of grant or makes a new research investment the effects on gender equality must be analysed and consideration given to whether any special measures are necessary. The analysis should address gender equality at the total level and also be according to the different types of grants and subject areas.

The task of the Swedish Research Council to promote gender equality throughout its sphere of activities, as well as gender equality as a factor for raising quality should be emphasized. The texts of calls, evaluation criteria and review formats should be considered from an equality perspective.

Members of Scientific Councils and other Councils and Committees and the members of review panels must be informed about the Swedish Research Council’s gender equality strategy. The review panels shall be instructed on gender equality issues during the information meetings prior to the review work. Other experts involved must also be informed of the strategy (available in Swedish and English).

The Swedish Research Council’s review handbooks must include written instructions for the review panels, giving attention to the following:
that all evaluation criteria must be clear and explicit. When the call is issued, the criteria and the instructions for applicants must be published on the Swedish Research Council’s website;

⁸ See Note 1.

that only “active research years” should be considered in evaluating the extent of scientific productivity, i.e. time off for parental leave, sick leave, or similar circumstances should be deducted.

Prior to each new review batch, the research officers at the Swedish Research Council must discuss the above instructions with the review panels.

Before a review panel submits its proposal for allocating research grants, it must calculate the proposed success rates and average size of grants for women and men, respectively. The secretaries general must present the review panels’ grant allocation proposals, from an equality perspective, to the respective Scientific Council, other Council or Committee (SCCC), commenting on possible gender disparities in success rates and average grant amounts. These presentations must be delivered before the SCCCs make their decisions. The respective SCCCs must attach to their decision a collective assessment of the results in relation to the Swedish Research Council’s gender equality strategy. These assessments should include comments by the SCCCs concerning possible disparities, as mentioned above, and a plan/strategy to rectify them. A written consensus opinion from each of the SCCCs must be forwarded to the board.

In conjunction with the Director General’s and the SCCCs’ presentation to the Board regarding the outcome of the annual calls for proposals, the success rates for women and men must be presented for each SCCC and each grant type. The average grant amount must also be reported by gender. A summary of the results shall be included in the Swedish Research Council’s annual report. Presentations by the SCCCs to the Board must include comments on possible disparities as regards the matters mentioned above, and a plan to rectify any disparities.

4. Gender equality perspective in analyses and evaluations

“The Swedish Research Council should include a gender equality perspective in each analysis and evaluation, where possible” (Goal 4).

A gender equality perspective should be included in every analysis and evaluation in so far as possible. This should also apply to memoranda, responses to consultations, documentation for discussion and decision-making, where relevant and possible. Direct and eventual indirect consequences for gender balance should be discussed in each analysis and evaluation. In those cases where a gender equality perspective has been deemed not possible or relevant, a specific justification should be given.

Gender balance should always be strived for in review panels and where external authors or experts are used. A statement of how the Research Council has fulfilled this objective should be provided annually to the Board.

5. A gender equality perspective in external communications

“The Swedish Research Council shall integrate a gender equality perspective in its external communication” (Goal 5).

A gender equality perspective shall be integrated in the Research Council’s external communications in all communication channels; it should also be clear in relevant contexts that the Swedish Research Council works to attain gender equality. The external image conveyed by the Swedish Research Council shall be gender-neutral in other respects too, and not reinforce gender stereotypes of, for example, researchers or subject areas.

A statement of how the Research Council has fulfilled this objective should be provided annually to the Board, at the latest when the annual report is submitted to the Government.

Appendix 4:

Ethics Principles: Permits/Approvals, and Good Research Practice

The administrative organisation⁹ has the responsibility to ensure that the research project complies with the terms and conditions established by Swedish law.

Permits and approvals

The applicant (project leader) has the responsibility to acquire all necessary permits and approvals for the research that receives a grant from the Swedish Research Council; these should be in place before the project is started.

- Research involving animal experiments requires approval from the Ethical Committee on Animal Experiments, in accordance with the Swedish Animal Welfare Act (1988:534).
- Research concerning humans and biological material from humans, and which falls under the Act on Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (2003:460), requires review and approval from an ethical review board.
- Some research may require additional permits e.g. research involving pharmaceuticals, genetically modified organisms, and ionizing radiation.

The Swedish Research Council assumes that the necessary permits and approvals have been obtained for the research covered by a grant application to the Swedish Research Council.

Good research practice and ethical considerations

The Swedish Research Council assumes that research conducted with funding from the Swedish Research Council adheres to good research practice. The applicant must in the application present the ethical issues associated with the research and describe how they will be addressed during the research project.

For applications to the Swedish Research Council the following applies

- Approvals should not be sent to the Swedish Research Council.
- The applicant and the administrative organisation confirms by signing the application that necessary permits and approvals are in place when the research begins and that all other conditions that apply to the grant will be complied with.
- The content of the application is correct. This is verified by the project leader and the administrating organization when signing the application.

⁹ Administrative entity: A state agency or physical or legal person within whose organisation the research is conducted. Universities or higher education institutions often serve as the administrative entity for research conducted with funding from the Swedish Research Council.

If a reviewer detects discrepancies

- If a reviewer suspects that an application contains deviations from the Swedish Research Council's guidelines or good research practice, these must be notified to the Swedish Research Council as soon as possible. The review task shall continue without effect as long as the Swedish Research Council does not announce anything else.
- The Swedish Research Council applies the internal guidelines “Handling discrepancies from ethical guidelines and good research practice in expert assessment of applications for research funding” to assess whether and, if so, how such case should be handled.

Appendix 5: Swedish Research Council in brief

The Swedish Research Council is Sweden's largest governmental research funding body and provides support for research of the highest scientific quality in all fields of science. Most of this relates to basic research.

A large part of the funding provided by the Swedish Research Council consists of support of scientific projects for which the researchers, themselves, have formulated the research topics and project aims, and developed methods to arrive at conclusions. In order to facilitate career development for researchers and make it easier for them to gain broader experience of the research community, the Council offers career and mobility support. In addition, it provides funding for research infrastructures, research environments, graduate schools, various forms of collaboration, and Swedish membership in a host of international organisations and major research facilities.

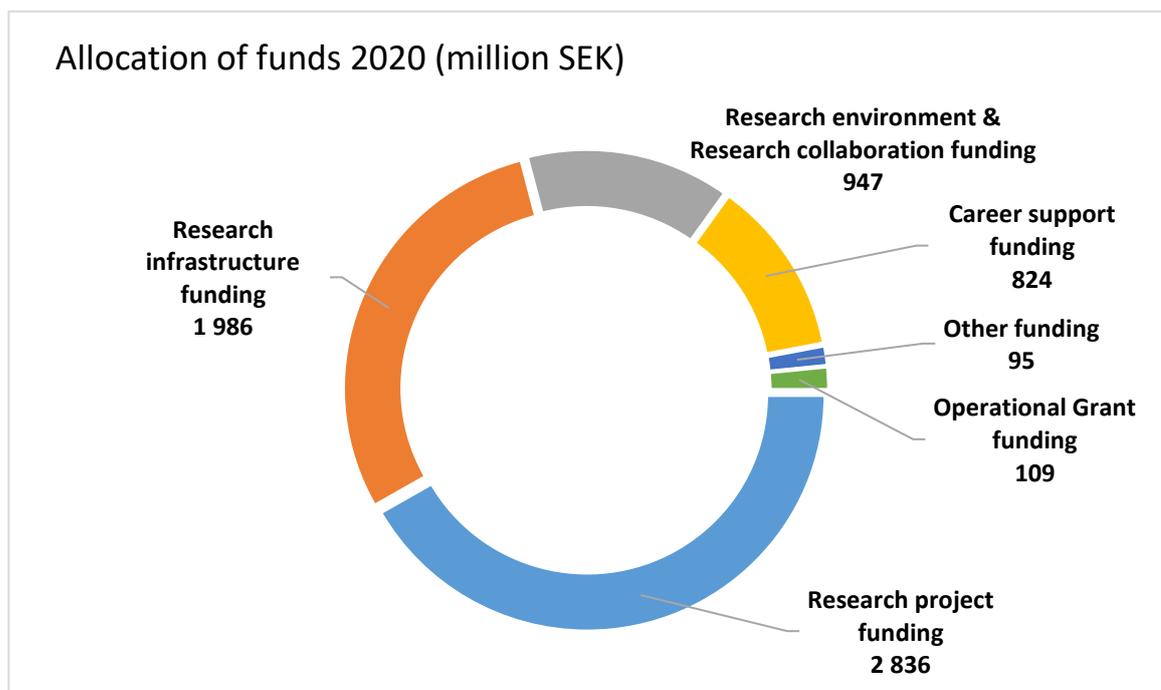
In addition to funding research, the Swedish Research Council is also responsible for communication about research and research results. The Council is also tasked with preparing analyses relating to research policy, acting an advisor to the Government on research policy issues evaluating research and supporting and developing the conditions of clinical studies.

The vision of the Swedish Research Council is to play a leading role in developing Swedish research of the highest scientific quality, and thereby contribute to the development of society.

In 2020, the Swedish Research Council paid SEK 6.7 billion in funding, mostly to basic research in all areas of science and research infrastructures.

A large part of the research funding went to projects that were proposed by the researchers themselves (researcher-initiated research). The Swedish Research Council has in total prepared 5 449 applications during 2020. Of these, 949 applications have been granted.

The diagram below shows allocation of funds based on support forms 2020 (million SEK).



Peer review

The Swedish Research Council recommends peer review as the best method of assessing scientific quality. The confidence of the research community in the Swedish Research Council is premised on the review being conducted by a knowledgeable, objective, impartial and transparent manner.

A total of 870 researchers served as members of review panels in 2020, with 48 per cent of the members of the review panels being associated with higher education institutions outside of Sweden.

Administration and organisation of the Swedish Research Council

The Swedish Research Council is a government agency within the Ministry of Education. The Council is headed by a Board and a Director-General, who is the head of the agency.

The Board of the Research Council has overall responsibility for operations as a whole, and makes decisions on general and strategic research issues according to the directives and guidelines adopted by the Parliament and Government. Six of the members are elected by an assembly of electors, which, in turn, are appointed by the higher education institutions in Sweden. The Chairperson and the remaining two members of the Board are appointed by the Government.

Under the Board, there are the scientific councils for humanities and social sciences, medicine and health, and natural and engineering sciences, the council for research infrastructures, as well as the committees for educational sciences, artistic research, and development research. Finally, there are committees for clinical therapy research and the national coordination of clinical studies.

The majority of the members of scientific councils, councils and committees are selected by the research community. As in the case of the election of the members of the Board, these are elected by electors. Some of the members are appointed by the Board of the Swedish Research Council, while several additional members are appointed by the Government.

The Director-General is responsible to the Board for ensuring that operations are conducted in accordance with the directives and guidelines decided by the Board. The Swedish Research Council has about 250 employees, and is divided into six departments – the departments for research funding, research policy, research infrastructure, communication, administration and the department of Sunet and associated services.

Appendix 6:

Contact information for Swedish Research Council personnel

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Appendix 7:

Guidelines for the composition of review panels within Humanities and Social Sciences

Decided on 2 December 2019 by the Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences, Minutes No 2019:6

The composition of the review panels is decided by the Scientific Council. The Scientific Council appoints one observer for each review panel from among the members of the Scientific Council. The Scientific Council members shall act as observers on review panels where they have subject expertise, and as necessary also on other review panels. The Scientific Council shall appoint chairs of the review panels as recommended by the observer. The redistribution panel members shall be proposed by the review panel chairs in consultation with the observer on the review panel, and be decided by the Scientific Council. The following applies to the composition of the review panels:

- Each review panel shall have a minimum of six members and a maximum of thirteen, including the chair.
- The mandate period for review panel members is one year, and this may be extended to a maximum of six years on the same review panel.
- The chair is elected for one year at a time, with a maximum mandate period of three years. The period as chair is counted as part of the overall mandate period of six years on a review panel.
- A vice chair is appointed from among the review panel.
- After a full mandate period on a review panel, the chair/vice chair/member will spend a qualifying period that normally lasts for three years, after which she/he may return as a member or vice chair of a review panel.
- The composition of the review panel shall cover a range of subjects and geographic areas.
- When appointing a review panel, the Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy shall be complied with and an even gender distribution shall be striven for (minimum 40% of each gender).
- When appointing a review panel, the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy shall be complied with.
- The review panels shall have at least two members who are active outside Sweden.
- Members of the review panels should be professors, and the minimum requirement is docent/associate professor, or corresponding. Exceptions from this rule must be justified.
- Vice-chancellors, deans and heads of major departments should not be appointed as members of review panels.
- The review panels should include competence to assess sex and gender perspectives in the research proposals. The guideline corresponds to the Swedish Research Council's mandate from the government to include sex and gender perspectives in funded research, when applicable.

- According to a decision by the Director General, review panel members (including chairs and observers) must not be behind an application handled by the review panel in question. In such a case, the member, chair or observer must either recuse her- or himself from this year's review work, or the application must be dealt with by another review panel

Appendix 8:

External reviewers

The definition of an external reviewer is a person who conducts reviews of applications to support a review panel (or other reviewing entity), but who is not her-/himself an elected member. An external reviewer may be a member of another review panel, or otherwise be outside the Swedish Research Council's review organisation. It is often an advantage to employ a foreign expert as external reviewer.

External reviewers are expensive, both in the form of fees and of time spent on recruiting and guiding them in the review process. For this reason, the use of external reviewers shall be restrictive. In addition to the external reviewers necessary due to conflict of interest situations, it is recommended that a maximum of one external reviewer is employed per ten applications for the panel. As far as possible, they shall be asked to review several applications in order to have a basis for comparison. This means that a panel with 100 applications overall should not employ more than ten external reviewers, over and above those required for specific conflict of interest situations.

The review panel or its chair may identify situations where external review is needed, and propose the person to employ. In normal cases, the person at the Swedish Research Council responsible for the review panel shall contact the proposed external reviewers. An external reviewer must not have an application under consideration by the review panel in question, and must not have a conflict of interest in relation to any applicant to be assessed.

External review is mandatory when a member of the Swedish Research Council's decision-making body (or corresponding) is the applicant (at least two external reviews are required before any decision). Other cases where external review is used are, typically:

- A conflict of interest situation within the review panel – confirmation is needed that also an entirely independent review leads to approximately the same result in the review.
- The scientific content of an application is such that the overall scientific competence of the review panel is insufficient to produce a sound review.

The main principle is that the review panel is fully responsible for the final evaluation of an application and the proposed decision. External reviewers shall not replace any dropout among review panel members.