Peer review handbook

Development research 2021

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Foreword

You are most welcome as a reviewer of scientific proposals at the Swedish Research Council within the area of Development Research! The Government of Sweden has assigned the Swedish Research Council to prepare, review and decide on grant proposals within Development Research. Our annual call for proposals includes the research project grant, the international postdoc grant within development research, the research network grant Swedish Research Links (SRL) and, new for this year, doctoral programmes within development research.

The work of assessing and ranking applications constitutes the foundation for the work of the Swedish Research Council, and your assignment as a member of one of our review panels is an important position of trust. It is very important that each application is reviewed by experts in the field with the highest possible scientific competence. We are therefore very grateful that you are willing to participate in this work.

This review handbook provides you with all the information you need for this review work. The purpose of the handbook is to make it easy to find the information that is relevant for the tasks to be carried out, and we hope that it will guide you in your review work. In addition to instructions for the various steps in the process, it also includes information on the Swedish Research Council's principles and guidelines for peer review, our conflict of interest policy and gender equality strategy. Practical instructions on the grading of applications are included, as are instructions on how final statements to be sent to applicants shall be written. Please read both the instructions and the appendices carefully, so that you are well prepared for your review work.

The handbook for reviewers will guide you through the process of reviewing applications and is intended to function as an aid for you in your assignment as an expert reviewer for our calls. You will also receive support and information from Swedish Research Council staff or the chair of your review panel throughout the evaluation process. I hope that you will find your work as a reviewer interesting and rewarding.

Erik Ahlgren
Deputy Secretary General
Development Research
Swedish Research Council

Introduction

Development research

The Government of Sweden has assigned the Swedish Research Council to administer support to the area of Development Research through the government's international aid budget. The Swedish Research Council funds research of the highest quality within the research area both through support to individual researchers in Sweden and through initiation of collaboration between researchers in Sweden and researchers in low-income and lower-middle income countries. The Swedish Research Council´s support to development research should be of particular relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development in low-income countries. Development research shall contribute to knowledge about the causes, consequences and possible solutions to poverty, as well as sustainable development, and the links between sustainable development and poverty reduction and other societal challenges in low-income countries and regions. Poverty reduction should be understood as multi-dimensional, not solely as lack of resources, but also lack of power and influence over ones situation, freedom of choice, security and respect for human rights.

The classification of low-income and lower-middle income countries follows the DAC list of ODA recipients.

In 2013, the Swedish Research Council established a Committee for Development Research (here also referred to as "the Committee") at the Research Council. The Committee is tasked with shaping strategies and developing the process for issuing calls and evaluating scientific quality and relevance of the applications received. Furthermore, the Committee works on integrating Development Research more closely within the Swedish Research Council and the Swedish research landscape more generally. The Committee also issues calls and appoints review panel members, makes funding decisions based on the panels' reviews and recommendations, and develops the evaluation process. Read more about the Committee here. Four types of grants are issued by the Committee this year: the research project grant within Development Research, the research network grant Swedish Research Links (SRL), international post-doc grant within Development Research and a grant for graduate schools within development research.

Research project grant within Development Research

The aim of the project grant in Development Research is to strengthen Swedish research of particular relevance to the fight against poverty and for sustainable development in low-income countries. Relevant applications of high quality within all scientific disciplines and subject areas, such as humanities, behavioural sciences, economics, social science, educational sciences, natural science, technology, environment, urban planning, medicine and health, as well as inter-disciplinary projects, may be supported.

Network grant for international collaboration - Swedish Research Links (SRL)

The purpose of the grant is to support the development of long-term research partnerships of high scientific quality between Swedish researchers and researchers from low-income and lower middle-income countries. The grant should support the establishment of a network/collaboration based on principles of mutual benefit and equality, and should be aimed at developing a joint research project around a specific research idea on topics of particular relevance to the fight against poverty and for sustainable development in low-income and lower middle-income countries. The network grants shall in the first instance lead

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to joint applications for research funds from funding bodies, nationally and internationally. Network grants are in the first instance intended for new collaborations. However, existing networks may apply if they have new research ideas. If the network is not intended to develop new research projects, but to construct a network around existing research, the application must state strong grounds for why this is of great scientific importance.

International postdoc grant within Development Research
The purpose of the grant is to give newly qualified researchers with a doctoral degree from a Swedish university the opportunity to expand their networks and their competences by working abroad under secure employment conditions. At least two thirds of the grant period is spent abroad, and at least one third in a low income or lower middle-income country. This time may be divided into several shorter periods. The research shall be of particular relevance to the fight against poverty and for sustainable development in low-income countries.

Applications for the research project grant, the research network grant (SRL), and the international postdoc grant within development research are reviewed by three review panels; one for Humanities and social sciences (UF-1), one for Natural, engineering and environmental sciences (UF-3), and one for Global health (UF-5). This peer review handbook is intended for members of these review panels. A separate panel will review applications for doctoral programmes/graduate schools within development research.
The peer review handbook is designed to reflect the review process step by step, in order to make it easier for you as a panel member to find the information you need for tasks to be carried out during each step. At the beginning of each section, there is a summary of the tasks to be carried out, and the date by which each task must be completed. In Chapter 6 you will find a summary in the form of a checklist of the various tasks at each stage of the process.

| Call and preparation | Review | Review panel meeting | Final statement | Decision and follow-up |

In this first section of the handbook, you will find information on some starting points and the principles that permeate the entire review work, as well as a brief description of the various roles involved in the process.

News this year

We urge those of you who have participated in our review panels in previous years to please pay particular attention to these changes:
- The call texts have been revised in order to emphasise the breadth of disciplines and scientific fields that may be relevant to development research, and encourage a broader range of applications, e.g. within the humanities.
- In order to highlight that relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development is a central aspect of development research, both call texts and guiding questions have been revised. The Committee for development research encourages panel members to take this into consideration and pay attention to the relevance of the projects throughout the review process.
- The assessment criterion Internationalisation and research environment, used for the assessment of international postdoc grant applications, is now evaluated using a seven-grade scale instead of a three-grade scale.

- Due to the ongoing pandemic, the Swedish Research Council has decided that all review panel meetings will be digital, held over Zoom, in 2021. An advantage of this technology is that it makes it easier to meet ahead of the review panel meeting in order to prepare for the various stages of the review process. You will be invited to two meetings, one in June, ahead of the individual review, and one about a week before the review panel meeting in September. At these meetings you will be receive necessary information about the coming steps of the review process, as well as be provided the opportunity to ask questions and get acquainted with you review panel colleagues.

General starting points and principles

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

Peer review

The portal paragraph to the Swedish Research Council's Instruction Ordinance establishes that "*the Swedish Research Council shall give support to basic research of the highest scientific quality within all fields of science*". The fundamental principle for assessing scientific quality is the peer review of applications for research grants that is carried out by the various review panels within each subject area. 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).

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 take into

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account the gender equality goal and work out the success rate in its proposal, as well as considering, and if necessary commenting on, the outcome. Gender equality is used as a boundary condition, and when ranking applications of equal scientific quality, applicants from the under-represented gender shall be prioritised.

Sex and gender perspectives

Since 2018, one of the tasks in the Swedish Research Council's directive from the Government is to work towards sex and gender perspectives being included, when applicable, in the research funded by us. How sex and gender perspectives are managed in research, when relevant, forms part of the assessment of scientific quality. You can read more about this on our website.

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 panel 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 – further information on this is available 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 research officer responsible.

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 personnel, that rules and policies are complied with. With the support from Swedish Research Council staff, the chair allocates applications between reviewers, and is responsible for identifying any need for external reviewers. The chair is also responsible for ensuring that the final statements issued by the review panel reflect the panel's discussion and assessments. The chair reviews all applications, gives grades and writes assessments, but does not rank the applications before the meeting. If the chair finds that the application is so far from their area of expertise that they cannot put a relevant grade, they may refrain from giving numerical grades, but shall still write an assessment. Together with the senior research officer, the chair prepares a proposal for the panel of which applications should be sifted, i.e. not discussed at the meeting, and suggested grades for these applications.

The vice chair is appointed by the panel chair in consultation 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 review panel shall also discuss applications during the review panel meeting, and give feedback to applicants whose applications have been discussed in the form of written final statements.

Observer

The Committee appoints its members as observers to the review panels. An observer acts as a link between the Committee for Development Research and the reviewing process. The observer fills an important role, together with the Swedish Research Council personnel, in upholding the quality of the review process. Observers provide feedback to the Committee and the Secretary General after each review period, but do not themselves take part in the review process.

Swedish Research Council 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 intentions of the Committee and the Swedish Research Council 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

| Call and preparation | Review | Review panel meeting | Final statement | Decision and follow-up |
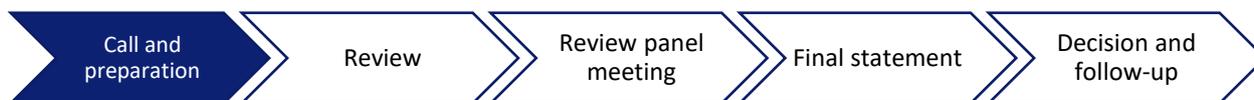
The first period covers everything that occurs before panel members start the reviewing. The panel members are recruited, the call is formulated and published, the review panel meeting is planned, etc. Once the call has closed, the applications are checked and allocated to the various review panels, and then to the members of the panel.

Summary of your tasks

	Shall be completed
☐ State account information in Prisma.	10 May
☐ Report any conflict of interest.	10 May

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 personal data is 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.

Allocation of applications to review panels

Once the call has closed, the applications are allocated to the review panels. Usually, applications are allocated to the panel the applicant has listed as the first choice. However, if the chair considers that an application should be reviewed by another panel, it might be moved.

Reporting any conflict of interest

Once the applications allocated to your review panel have become available in Prisma, you must report any conflict of interest as soon as possible. This is done in Prisma. Only when all panel members have reported conflicts of interest will applications be allocated to individual members. It is a good idea to communicate to the Swedish Research Council personnel if any doubts arise, or on issues of conflict of interest or competency to review. If you discover later on in the process that you have a conflict of interest, you must report this as soon as possible to the research officer responsible.

Allocation of applications to reviewers

Each application is allocated to at least four reviewers (including the chair), of which one is given the role of rapporteur (never the chair). The rapporteur is responsible for presenting the application for discussion at the meeting, and for summarising the review panel's final statement following the meeting. It is the chair, in collaboration with the coordinator of the review process, who allocates the applications to the other reviewers.

Planning and preparation for the review panel meeting

The review panel meeting is held over the digital platform Zoom. You will receive instructions about how to get started with Zoom ahead of the meeting. In the meeting agenda you will find a link for connecting to the meeting.

Make sure that you have a webcam (built into your computer or external) and a microphone, as well as stable internet connection. We strongly recommend that you use a headset with a microphone, as this will provide the best sound for you and the other meeting participants. If you do not already have a headset, you can by one at our expense, at a cost of no more than 50 EUR. If possible, we recommend that you use an external screen, in addition to your laptop screen.

2. Review

| Call and preparation | Review | Review panel meeting | Final statement | Decision and follow-up |
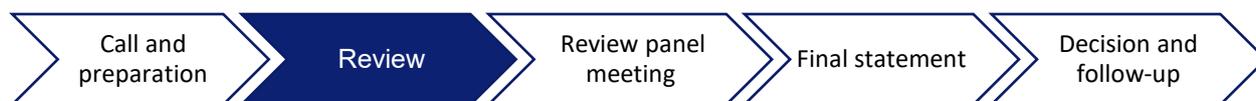
The review period lasts from the time you get access to the applications to be reviewed by you in Prisma, until approximately 2-3 weeks before the review panel meeting. During this period, you read the applications allocated to you, write evaluations (assessment or preliminary statement), grade and rank the applications reviewed by you. 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. During this stage, a first sifting of the applications is also carried out.

Summary of your tasks

	Shall be completed
☐ Grade and write detailed comments (preliminary statements) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur.	16 August (UF-3) 1 September (UF-1 and UF-5)
☐ Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer.	16 August (UF-3) 1 September (UF-1 and UF-5)
☐ Rank all applications allocated to you (as rapporteur and reviewer).	16 August (UF-3) 1 September (UF-1 and UF-5)
☐ Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' and external reviewers' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of the strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur.	Before the meeting in September
☐ Check the list of the screened-out applications on the bulletin board in Prisma to determine whether any of the screened-out applications should be brought up for discussion at the meeting. Also check if you agree with the suggested grades.	Before the meeting in September
☐ Please 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.	As soon as possible

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☐ Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.	As soon as possible

Individual review

Each application is reviewed and graded by at least four members of the review panel; one rapporteur and three further reviewers (including the chair who reviews all applications). The individual review work is carried out in Prisma.

For the applications where you are the rapporteur, you write a *preliminary statement*, which shall consist of a numerical grade and detailed written comments on all evaluation criteria where strengths and weaknesses of the project are pointed out. You shall also review the budget of each project, and assess whether the budget posts correspond to the project at hand. Based on this assessment, the rapporteur may propose adjustments of the budget. In the role as reviewer, you write an *assessment*, which shall also consist of a numerical grade and written comments, but the comments do not have to be as detailed as those of the rapporteur.

Your review shall only 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 the applicant's private life, various types of rumour, such as lack of research ethics or assumptions that someone else might have written the application.

The the content of an application and the information about the 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 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.

You must 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 investigated further.

Evaluation criteria and grading scales

Your review shall be based on four evaluation criteria –Scientific quality of the proposed research/network, Novelty and originality, Merits of the applicant/network, and Feasibility. These are the Research Council's basic criteria for evaluating quality. In addition, a fifth basic criteria is assessed for network grants; Complementarity of the research collaboration, and for international postdoc grants; Internationalization and the research environment.

Applications within development research are also evaluated using an additional criterion: Relevance for the call.

1. The criteria are evaluated against a seven- or three-point grading scales (as detailed below), and are intended to reflect the application's "quality profile". Please observe that the grading scale is an ordinal scale, where it is not possible to specify differences or distances between the values. For the basic criteria, there is no pre-determined cut-off for

what is considered a fundable application[1]. However, for the criterion Relevance for the call, a grade of less than 2 for will lead to sifting of the application.

One part of the assessment of scientific quality is assessing how sex and gender perspectives are managed in the research, when relevant. The applicant must indicate whether sex and gender perspectives are relevant (Yes or No) and describe in which way they will use such perspectives, or motivate why you choose not to do so.

Sex and gender perspectives in research content may concerny anything from including and analysing differences between men and women in the study material (sex perspectives) to applying a critical perspective to the creation and understanding of gender identities (gender perspectives). Please observe that sex and gender perspectives in research content should not be confused with gender distribution in research teams or gender equality in assessing research applications.

To facilitate the evaluation of the various criteria, there are a number of guiding questions to be taken into account in the evaluation work. These are listed below for each call.

Guiding questions for research project grants

Scientific quality of the proposed research (1–7)
- Is the project scientifically significant?
- Does the proposal have clear conceptual and theoretical foundations?
- Is the overall design and description of the project sufficiently clear and systematic, for example in its definition of research questions, hypotheses and methodology?
- Are the scientific/intellectual merits of the proposed research clear, convincing and compelling?
- Does the proposed project have the character of thoroughness, e.g. in its definition of the problem, and review of the state of the art?
- Are the proposed research methods suitable to the aims and objectives?
- Are the methods of data management such as data collection, analysis and statistics well defined and appropriate?
- If there are no participating researchers from low-income countries: Has the applicant convincingly described how this may or may not affect the scientific quality of the project?
- Has the applicant in a satisfactory manner described the possible importance of sex and/or gender for the research project? If not, is there a clear description to why?
- If sex and gender is described as relevant to the research project, has the applicant considered sex and gender in the study design and description of the proposed work, for instance as part of preliminary data, the choice of samples or study population, or data analyses?

Novelty and originality (1–7)
- Does the project extend or challenge current understanding, opinion or practice in its field?
- To what extent does the proposed project define new, compelling scientific questions within its scientific area?

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[1] In the 2020 Development Research call, all project grant applications that were granted had an overall grade of at least 5.

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- Does the proposed project have the potential to substantially increase the knowledge within its scientific area? (For example novel concepts or theories, new directions for research and advancement of the field)
- Does the project include use of novel technologies/methodologies, or innovative application of existing methodologies/technologies in a novel way or context?
- Does the researcher propose a line of research with clear progression and novelty in relation to previous research in the field or is he/she simply adding details to existing knowledge?
- In what novel way does the proposed project have potential for scientific and/or societal impact in low income countries?

Merits of the applicant (1–7)

- Do the applicant, participating researchers and other team members have sufficient research experience and expertise in the research area of the proposed project? (Also considering how the different roles and responsibilities are distinguished.)
- Considering the research area and the applicant´s career age: Of what merits are the previous publications and other scientific achievements (e.g. supervisor experience, external funding, research collaborations)? Do these show a distinct and independent line of research?
- Is there ability to successfully disseminate research findings?
- Does the applicant have a sufficient scientific network for implementing the proposed project?

A seven-grade scale is used to evaluate the criteria Scientific quality of the proposed research, Novelty and originality, and 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 (1–3)

- Is the general design, including time schedule, optimal for implementing the proposed project?
- Does the project include the availability and accessibility of personnel with relevant skills? (Also taking into consideration the activity level.)
- Is the environment suitable for carrying out the proposed research, considering e.g. equipment, facilities/infrastructures and other necessary resources and support?
- If applicable, is it described how the permits for implementation of the project will be acquired?
- Are the proposed research methods, infrastructures, experiments and fieldwork appropriate for the implementation of the project?
- How is the balance between the project´s feasibility and risks and its potential gains? (high risk/high gain)

A three-grade scale is used to carry out an evaluation of the feasibility of the proposed project.

Feasible	**3**
Partly feasible	**2**
Not feasible	**1**

For all criteria, you can also mark "Insufficient", if you consider that the application lacks sufficient information to allow a reasonable evaluation to be made of the criterion.

Overall grade (1–7)

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 a 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.

Relevance for the call

Relevance is a central criterion to development research, and it is evaluated separately from the scientific quality, and is not included in the overall grade. The Research Project Grant in Development Research is financed through development aid funds provided by the government, and research receiving support must be of particular relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development in low-income countries.

- Does the proposed research have the potential to contribute to better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression? Is it clear how?
- Does the proposed research have the potential to promote sustainable development in low-income countries?
- Is the proposed research addressing and targeting conditions and challenges of relevance particularly for low-income countries?

A three-grade scale is used to evaluate the relevance.

Very relevant	**3**
Relevant	**2**
Not relevant	**1**

Guiding questions for network grants - Swedish Research Links

Scientific quality of the proposed research (1–7)
- Does the proposed collaboration network have the potential to build a sustainable and equal scientific partnership to address development challenges?
- To what extent can the proposed network, based on the included collaborators, define new, compelling scientific questions within its scientific area?
- How does the research collaboration build on the research conducted independently by the partners, and what is the potential added value of the network?
- Is the overall description of the collaborative network sufficiently clear, convincing and compelling, for example in the definition of research questions, description of planned activities and impact of the research collaboration?
- Does the proposal contain plans for sustaining the collaboration/partnership beyond the proposed duration of network funding?

Novelty and originality (1–7)
- To what extent does the proposed network promote the establishment of a new research network and new researcher-to-researcher relationships?
- If principal investigators have collaborated before: Is the proposed collaboration based on a new research topic? What were the experiences of that previous collaboration and can additional funding lead to new collaborative research proposals with realistic ideas how to obtain funding?
- Does the network combine scientific expertise and capacity in a novel way in relation to the research area and the countries involved?
- Does the network have the potential to extend or challenge current understanding, opinion or practice in its field?
- Does the research network propose a line of research with clear progression and novelty in relation to previous research in the field or will the formed network simply add details to existing knowledge?
- In what novel way does the proposed network have potential for scientific and/or societal impact in low-income and lower middle-income countries?

Merits of the network (1–7)
- Does the network have sufficient research experience, expertise and scientific connections for the implementation of the proposed collaboration?
- • Considering the research area and career ages: Of what merits are the previous publications and other scientific achievements (e.g. supervisor experience, external funding, research collaborations)? Do these show a distinct and independent line of research?

- • Does the applicant have previous experience from research collaborations with partners in low-income or lower middle-income countries?

A seven-grade scale is used to evaluate the criteria Scientific quality of the proposed network, Novelty and originality, and Merits of the network.

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 (1–3)

- Is the proposed plan in general, including activities and time schedule, optimal for starting up and implementing the proposed network?
- Does the network aim to establish long-term research collaboration and contain a realistic plan for how to raise funds for such collaboration?
- Does the proposed collaboration network include the availability and accessibility of relevant personnel, skills, equipment, facilities/infrastructures and other necessary resources?
- Is the environment suitable for carrying out the proposed network activities?

A three-grade scale is used to carry out an evaluation of the feasibility of the proposed network.

Feasible	3
Partly feasible	2
Not feasible	1

For all criteria, you can also mark "Insufficient", if you consider that the application lacks sufficient information to allow a reasonable evaluation to be made of the criterion.

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Complementarity of the research collaboration (1-7)
- Is there appropriateness of the team members in terms of how the researchers´ expertise complement each other, and in how the different roles and responsibilities are distinguished?
- • Does the collaboration bring mutual added value to the proposed research; compared to if the partners were not working together?
- • Can the collaboration lead to transfer of knowledge between applicants?
- • Is the collaboration based on principles of co-design, mutual benefit and equality?

The seven-grade scale (used to evaluate the criteria Scientific quality of the proposed network, Novelty and originality, and Merits of the network) is used to evaluate the criterion Complementarity of the research collaboration, which applies only to applications for network grants (SRL).

For all criteria, you can also mark "Insufficient", if you consider that the application lacks sufficient information to allow a reasonable evaluation to be made of the criterion.

Overall grade (1–7)

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 a 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. For network grants (SRL), the scientific quality and the complementarity of the proposed network should be given more weight in the overall grade.

Relevance for the call

Relevance is a central criterion to development research, and it is evaluated separately from the scientific quality, and is not included in the overall grade. The Network Grant Swedish Research Links is financed through development aid funds provided by the government, and research networks receiving support must be of particular relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development in low-income and lower middle-income countries.

- Does the proposed research idea have the potential to contribute to better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression? Is it clear how?
- Does the proposed research idea have the potential to promote sustainable development in low-income and lower middle-income countries?
- Is the proposed research idea addressing and targeting conditions and challenges of relevance particularly for low-income and lower middle-income countries?

A three-grade scale is used to evaluate the relevance.

Very relevant	**3**
Relevant	**2**

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Not relevant	1

Guiding questions for international postdoc grants

Scientific quality of the proposed research (1–7)

- Is the project scientifically significant?
- Does the proposal have clear conceptual and theoretical foundations?
- Is the overall design and description of the project sufficiently clear and systematic, for example in its definition of research questions, hypotheses and methodology?
- Are the scientific/intellectual merits of the proposed research clear, convincing and compelling?
- Does the proposed project have the character of thoroughness, e.g. in its definition of the problem, and review of the state of the art?
- Are the proposed research methods suitable to the aims and objectives?
- Are the methods of data management such as data collection, analysis and statistics well defined and appropriate?
- Has the applicant in a satisfactory manner described the possible importance of sex and/or gender for the research project? If not, is there a clear description to why?
- If sex and gender is described as relevant to the research project, has the applicant considered sex and gender in the study design and description of the proposed work, for instance as part of preliminary data, the choice of samples or study population, or data analyses?

Novelty and originality (1–7)

- Does the project extend or challenge current understanding, opinion or practice in its field?
- To what extent does the proposed project define new, compelling scientific questions within its scientific area?
- Does the proposed project have the potential to substantially increase the knowledge within its scientific area? (For example novel concepts or theories, new directions for research and advancement of the field)
- Does the project include use of novel technologies/methodologies, or innovative application of existing methodologies/technologies in a novel way or context?
- Does the researcher propose a line of research with clear progression and novelty in relation to previous research in the field or is he/she simply adding details to existing knowledge?
- In what novel way does the proposed project have potential for scientific and/or societal impact in low-income countries?

Merits of the applicant (1–7)

- How strong are the applicant's merits and competence in relation to career age, research area and previous research environment?
- To what degree does the applicant's previous experience and scientific competence strengthen the project?
- Do the publications and other scientific achievements of the applicant show the potential for a distinct and independent line of research? Focus is on the most relevant and important reports, with emphasis on quality rather than quantity.

- Does the applicant have a sufficient scientific network for implementing the proposed project?

A seven-grade scale is used to evaluate the criteria Scientific quality of the proposed research, Novelty and originality, and 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 (1–3)

- Is the general design, including time schedule, optimal for implementing the proposed project?
- Is the environment suitable for carrying out the proposed research, considering supervision, equipment, facilities/infrastructures and other necessary resources and support etc.?
- If applicable, is it described how the permits for implementation of the project will be acquired?
- Are the proposed research methods, infrastructures, experiments and fieldwork appropriate for the implementation of the project?
- How is the balance between the project´s feasibility and risks and its potential gains? (high risk/high gain)

A three-grade scale is used to carry out an evaluation of the feasibility of the proposed project.

Feasible	3
Partly feasible	2

Not feasible	**1**

Internationalisation and research environment

Here an evaluation is made of the opportunities for the applicant to develop her or his merits as a researcher at the foreign host institution(s).

- To what extent does the foreign host institution(s) seem relevant for the research the application concerns?
- How suitable is the foreign research environment for the applicant's ability to develop new competences, his or hers research network and independence as a researcher?
- If the applicant plans to spend time in Sweden, is that time well-motivated and is the research environment favourable for the applicant's ability to develop as a researcher?

The seven-grade scale (used to evaluate the criteria Scientific quality, Novelty and originality, and Merits of the applicant) is used to evaluate the criterion Internationalisation and research environment, which applies only to applications for international postdoc grants within development research.

For all criteria, you can also mark "Insufficient", if you consider that the application lacks sufficient information to allow a reasonable evaluation to be made of the criterion.

Overall grade (1–7)

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 a 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.

Relevance for the call

Relevance is a central criterion to development research, and it is evaluated separately from the scientific quality, and is not included in the overall grade. The International Postdoc Grant in Development Research is financed through development aid funds provided by the government, and research receiving support must be of particular relevance to poverty reduction and sustainable development in low-income countries.
- Does the proposed research have the potential to contribute to better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression? Is it clear how?
- Does the proposed research have the potential to promote sustainable development in low-income countries?
- Is the proposed research addressing and targeting conditions and challenges of relevance particularly for low-income countries?

A three-grade scale is used to evaluate the relevance.

Very relevant	3
Relevant	2
Not relevant	1

Ranking of applications

In addition to grading, you shall also rank each specific application against all the other applications you have reviewed. This is done in Prisma. Ranking is done separately for the three grant types – research project grant, network grant (SRL) and international postdoc grant. You must rank all the applications you have been allocated (both those for which you are the rapporteur, and those for which you are a reviewer). For detailed instructions, please see Prisma's User Manual. The ranking serves as a supplement to the grading when the review panel's applications are compared with each other. Ahead of the review panel meeting, all individual rankings of all the reviewers are weighed together into a preliminary joint ranking for each application. The resulting list is used in the sifting stage (see below).

It is very important to complete the ranking in time for the applications to be sifted before the meeting. At the same time, the ranking should not be carried out at too early a stage of the review work, as it might happen that you are allocated further applications to review at a late stage (for example if a conflict of interest is discovered late).

The chair reviews all applications, but does not rank them.

Please note:

Several applications cannot be given the same rank.

Research project grant proposals, network grant proposals, and international postdoc proposals are ranked separately.

External reviewers

When assigning review tasks, the review panel chair also identifies applications that require external review. 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 the conflict of interest situation within the group makes an application difficult to evaluate.

The assessments by external reviewers will be available to all panel members on the bulletin board in Prisma ahead of the meeting and shall be presented at the meeting by the rapporteur of each application.

Sifting

In order to have the opportunity to discuss the applications deemed as having a reasonable chance of being awarded a grant, the Research Council has decided on a sifting process, where the applications with the lowest grades and ranking are screened out before the review panel meeting.

In discussion with the senior research officer, the chair produces a sifting proposal, including a list of applications to be screened out and proposed grades for each screened out

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application. The proposal is based on the preliminary joint ranking for each application, summarised from the individual ranking by each reviewer, and the grades from all reviewers.

A ranking list is constructed with the highest ranked applications at the top. In discussion with staff from the Swedish Research Council, the chair identifies a break-off point on the list, where the applications below the break-off point have received such low grades and rankings that it is not reasonable to assume that they will be awarded funding. Applications which have been assessed as not relevant to the call (relevance grade of 1) by a majority of reviewers may also be sifted. There should be a margin of error for the sifted applications, and no more than 50 % of the applications may be screened out.

The chair shall also identify any application that, despite having a low ranking, should still be discussed at the meeting, for example applications where the ranking or grading by the reviewers differ considerably. The sifting shall also be carried out with the gender distribution of the applications in mind, in order to ensure that the process is not applied differentially for women and for men.

The chair proposes grades for each application suggested to be sifted. This is also done in discussion with staff from the Swedish Research Council.

The proposed list of applications to be screened out and their suggested grades will be made available to all panel members on the bulletin board in Prisma ahead of the meeting. It is important that you review this proposal before the meeting, as the panel needs to agree on a final list of sifted applications before the discussion of the other applications can start.

Please note:

As a panel member, you can ask for an application to be brought up for discussion at the meeting, even if the chair has proposed that it is screened out, and you can suggest changes of the proposed grades. You can do this before the meeting, which will help the staff to prepare for the meeting, or you can present your views at the meeting.

3. Review panel meeting

| Call and preparation | Review | Review panel meeting | Final statement | Decision and follow-up |

At the review panel meeting, the applications are discussed, using the assessment and grading done by you and the other panel members ahead of the meeting as the starting point. The review panel shall then work out a joint grade for the subsidiary criteria of each application, and an overall grade for scientific quality, and also draw up a ranked priority list in which the panel lists the applications proposed for a grant award within the given budgetary framework, including a number of reserves. At the end of the review panel meeting, panel members are also encouraged to provide feedback on the review process.

Summary of review panel tasks

☐ Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for screened-out applications.

☐ Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for each application discussed.

☐ Agree on a proposal for the applications to be awarded funding within the review panel's budgetary framework.

☐ Agree on a ranked priority list including reserves.

☐ Contribute with feedback on the review process and this year's applications.

Screened-out applications

At the start of the review panel meeting, the sifting proposal is discussed and the panel members agree on the applications to be rejected and thus not subject of further discussion and also on their grades. Screened-out applications may be given an overall grade of 4 or less. If the panel disagrees on whether or not an application should be rejected, the application in question should always remain for further discussion at the panel meeting.

Discussion on applications

The applications that have not been screened out are then discussed on the basis of the individual reviews carried out before the meeting, and taking into account all the subsidiary criteria used in the review. The reviewers of an application should prepare for the discussion by reading the assessments and grades given by the other reviewers, including any assessments by external reviewers.

The applications are discussed for one call at a time and in the order of registration number. The chair leads the discussion, which starts with the rapporteur presenting the strengths and weaknesses of the application, followed by the other reviewers giving their assessments. The rapporteur is responsible for including any assessments from external reviewers in the discussion. For each application discussed at the meeting, the panel shall agree on subsidiary

grades and an overall grade. During the discussion, the rapporteur for each application shall make notes to be able to formulate the panel's final statement, so that it reflects the joint assessment of the panel. Swedish Research Council staff also takes notes of the grades agreed by the panel, and a list will be made available in Prisma after the meeting.

The review panel has equal responsibility for each application reviewed by the panel, and each one shall be evaluated based on its own merits and irrelevant information shall not be discussed. The 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.

It is also important that an application/applicant receives a new assessment each time they apply, 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.

Please be aware 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 Swedish Research Council personnel will 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 personnel in private, and not in front of the entire panel.

Prioritising

Once all applications have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on the grades for each application, the panel shall carry out a prioritisation of the applications with the highest scientific quality. To facilitate this, the Swedish Research Council staff will sort the applications according to their grades and share the resulting list at the meeting. The applications will be sorted by 1). Overall grade, 2). Scientific quality, 3). Relevance, and, if the panel members chose to do so, 4). Novelty and originality.

The chair and the Swedish Research Council staff will make sure that the rules concerning conflicts of interest are upheld, also during the comparison of applications in order to produce a final list of prioritised projects. In order to achieve this, and be able to differentiate between applications with equal grading, there may be a need for additional reading of applications in order to have a sufficient number of panel members who are familiar with the applications being compared.

The prioritisation shall result in the review panel's producing a proposal for applications to be awarded grants within the panel's budgetary framework. As described below, gender equality should be considered when prioritising applications of equivalent scientific quality. The panel may recommend that individual applications are awarded smaller amounts than what is stated in the application, if the requested budget is deemed oversized compared to the activities proposed. The panel shall also draw up a priority list with reserves, covering the applications that fall immediately outside the panel's budgetary framework.

Special conditions

For Development Research grants, it has been established that gender equality shall be a special condition for prioritising applications of equivalent scientific quality. This means that in conjunction with the overall prioritisation, the review panel shall take into account 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.

Special conditions are only applied in the final prioritisation of applications, not by individual reviewers in their work ahead of the review panel meeting or when discussing the grades.

Feedback

In conjunction with the review panel meeting, the panel is encouraged to provide feedback on the review process. You are welcome to give feedback throughout the process, but you will also be given the opportunity to give any comments during the concluding item on the meeting agenda.

4. Final statement

| Call and preparation | Review | Review panel meeting | **Final statement** | Decision and follow-up |
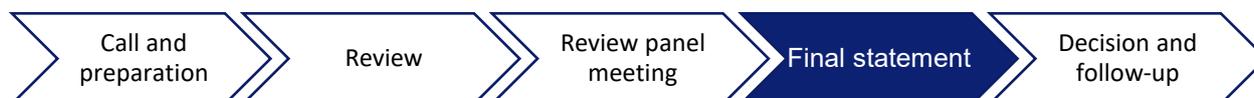
Following the review panel meeting, there remains to write the panel's final statement on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. It is then the task of the chair to scrutinise the final statements and to ensure they reflect the discussion by the review panel. As rapporteur, you may be asked to supplement the final statement in this conjunction.

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 be entered into Prisma no later than one week after the review panel meeting (see Prisma for the exact date).	14 September (UF-3) 7 October (UF-1 and UF-5)
☐	As necessary, supplement final statements following review by the chair.	As soon as possible

The rapporteur writes a final statement

The discussion at the review panel meeting forms the basis for the review panel's written final statement, which together with the grades is the end product of the review process and forms the basis for the funding decision. The final statement and grades are also sent to the applicant when the grant decision has been published. The final statement is therefore a central document, and it is important that the written text corresponds to the grades, and describes objectively the main strengths and weaknesses of the application.

You are responsible for writing final statements for the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. The preliminary statement you have entered into Prisma ahead of the review panel meeting can 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. As rapporteur, you have one week 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 meeting shall receive a written final statement from the panel. The applications that have been screened out, and not discussed at the meeting, receive final statements containing their grades and a standard text. These final statements are produced by the Research Council personnel

The chair reviews all final statements by the rapporteurs

Once the written final statements have been entered into Prisma, the chair and the senior research officer read them. The chair is responsible for ensuring that 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.

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General advice and recommendations on writing final statements

The final statement shall reflect the review panel's joint overall evaluation, including any relevant points from external assessments. The final statement is part of the material that forms the basis for the decision by the Committee for Development Research and shall help the applicant understand the grounds for the review panel's quality assessment. It is therefore very important that it is of high quality and that it is based on the discussions at the panel meeting.

When completing your final statements, you should consider the following:

Do
- **Do focus on describing both the main strengths and weaknesses of the application.** Try to emphasise relevant conceptual, structural and/or methodological issues as discussed at the review panel meeting.
- **Do make sure that the written comments correspond to the grades.** It is helpful to use the definitions of the grading scale in the justifications (Outstanding, Excellent, Very good to excellent, Very good, Good, Weak, and Poor). For example, if a grade of 4 is given, the justification should contain both strengths and minor weaknesses in line with the definition of this grade.
- **Do consider the guiding questions** for the different criteria when you formulate the final statement.
- **Do write concisely but do not be too brief.** The content rather than the length of the text is of significance. However, too brief justifications may counteract the aim, which is to help the applicant understand the grounds for the assessment.
- Do comment on whether divergence from the general instructions for the application has been weighed into the assessment of the application.
- Do write in English and use a language that is constructive and objective.

Do not
- Do not include a long summary of the applicant or the research described in the application. The focus should be the assessment of the application, not a description of the project.
- Do not state any individual comments (such as "I think" or "In my view"). The final statement is from the review panel collectively.
- Do not include quantifiable data, such as the exact number of publications, or bibliometric data.
- Do not include personal details (such as gender or age).
- Do not include any recommendation on whether to refuse or grant an application.
- Do not state that an application does not belong to or is unsuitable for the review panel, or for the Swedish Research Council. The review panel is obliged to review all applications in the panel.

5. Decision and follow-up

| Call and preparation | Review | Review panel meeting | Final statement | Decision and follow-up |
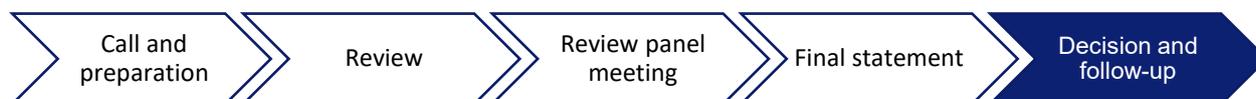
The final step in the process is the grant decision itself. The Committee for Development Research of the Swedish Research Council decides on the applications to be awarded or refused, based on the review panels' proposals. Following each review batch, an internal follow-up is also carried out of the process and the outcome.

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.

Decision

The decision on Development Research grants is made by the Committee for Development research. The decision is based on the priority lists (including reserves) arrived at by the review panels, any justifications for the lists from the chairs and the review panels' written final statements. The decision is published shortly thereafter on www.vr.se and in Prisma, and the applicants are also informed of the outcome.

Follow-up

Following each review cycle, an internal follow-up is carried out of the process and the outcome. An important starting point for this follow-up is the feedback you provide as a panel member in conjunction with the review panel meeting. In addition to opinions from the review panel, 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. Complaints or requests for 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.

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6. Checklist

Nedan hittar du en sammanställning över de olika uppgifter du har under processens olika steg.

Call and preparations	☐ State account information in Prisma. ☐ Report any conflicts of interest.
Review	☐ Grade and write detailed 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. ☐ Rank all applications allocated to you (as rapporteur or reviewer). ☐ Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' and external reviewers' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of the strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur. ☐ Check the list of the screened-out applications on the bulletin board in Prisma to determine whether any of the screened-out applications should be brought up for discussion at the meeting. Also check if you agree with the suggested grades. ☐ Please 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 problems with an application. ☐ Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any divergence from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or any scientific misconduct.
Review panel meeting	☐ Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for screened-out applications. ☐ Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for each application discussed. ☐ Agree on a proposal for the applications to be awarded funding within the review panel's budgetary framework. ☐ Agree on a priority list with reserves. ☐ 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.
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.

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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.

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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 scientific [2] 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.

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[2] 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 policy[3]

▪ 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.[4]

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.

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[3] 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.
[4] 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.

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- 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 interest[5]

- 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)

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[5] 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.

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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.

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- 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 ones 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

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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.

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- 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.

7. 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 rates[6] and receive the same average grant amounts, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant[7];
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)[8].
Unless otherwise specified, the Director General is responsible for advancing the efforts towards achieving equality.

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[6]Attainment of the goal must of course be assessed in the context of a sufficiently large number of decisions.
[7]Success rates for women and men refer to the percentage of applications approved among total applications received from women and men respectively.
[8]These 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.

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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.
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

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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. **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. **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."[9] (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.

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[9] See Note 1.

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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; *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.

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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 organisation[10] has the responsibility to ensure that the research project complies with the terms and conditions established by Swedish law.

1.1 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.

1.2 Good research practise 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.

1.3 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.

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[10] 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.

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1.4 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.
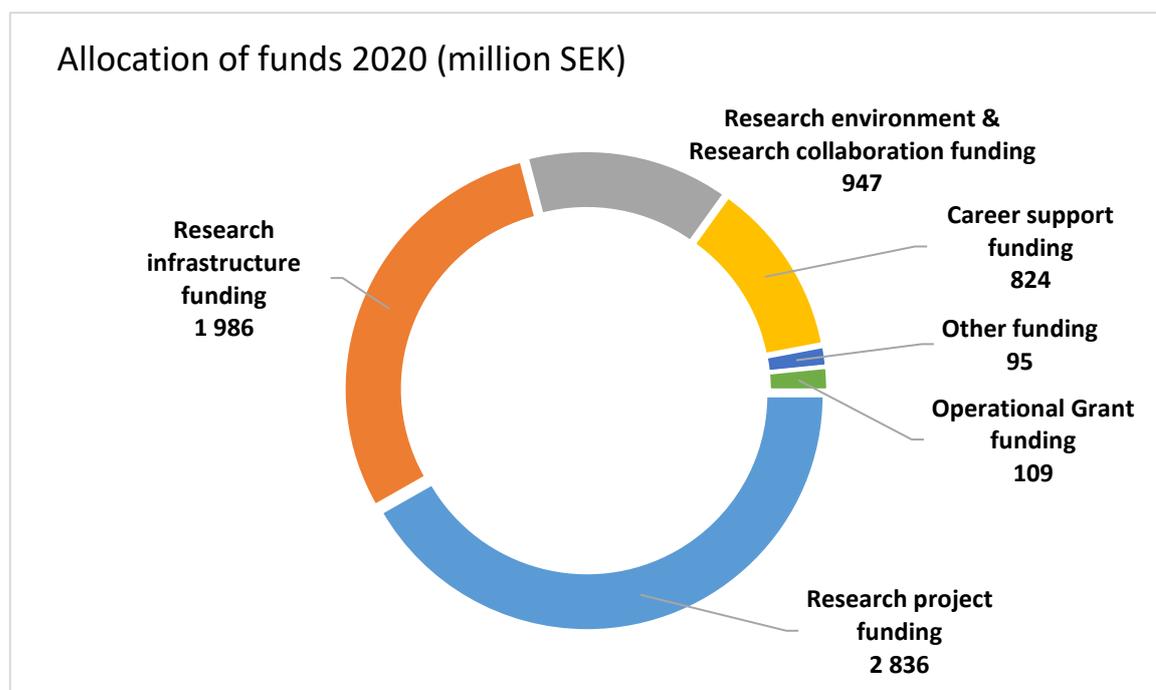
In addition to funding research, the Swedish Research Council is also responsible for communication about research and research results. The Council is also tasked with preparing analyses relating to research policy, acting an advisor to the Government on research policy issues evaluating research and 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).

Allocation of funds 2020 (million SEK)

- Research environment & Research collaboration funding 947
- Career support funding 824
- Other funding 95
- Operational Grant funding 109
- Research project funding 2 836
- Research infrastructure funding 1 986

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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 a 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.

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Appendix 6:
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