Peer review handbook

Interdisciplinary research environment 2021

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FOREWORD

This review handbook is intended to function as an aid for you in your assignment as an expert reviewer for our call for *Research Environment for interdisciplinary research.* The aim of the call is to support the development of innovative interdisciplinary research environments for research groups with genuinely different scientific backgrounds. The research environment does not have to be physical, in one location, research collaborations transcending borders are welcome to apply.

The review handbook is designed to reflect the review process step by step. The purpose is to make it easy to find the information that is relevant for the tasks to be carried out, and we hope that it will guide you in your review work. As well as instructions for the various steps in the process, it also includes information on the Swedish Research Council's general guidelines and on 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. The quality of the final statements is important, since these will be communicated to the applicants after the grant decisions. Please read both the instructions and the appendices carefully, so that you are well prepared for your review work.

The work of reviewing 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. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to welcome you as an expert reviewer for the Swedish Research Council.

Mattias Marklund
Secretary General for Natural and Engineering Sciences

INTRODUCTION

The grant for interdisciplinary research environments aims to give opportunities for research teams to develop interdisciplinary research and research environments, where ground-breaking discoveries may be expected. The call relates to research where theories, methodology, factual knowledge and/or data from differing disciplines are combined in ways that open up new research fields and research approaches. It is a long-term support of 3-5 million SEK per year for a period of 4 to 6 years.

Calls for this grant type are made every third year, and the applications are reviewed by an international review panel with an interdisciplinary background. This peer review handbook is intended for reviewers who are members of this panel.

The handbook is designed to reflect the review process step by step. The intention is 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 end of each section, there is a summary of the tasks to be carried out, and as applicable the date by which each task must be completed. Chapter 8 also has a summary in the form of a checklist of the various tasks you have during the different stages of the process.

Call and preparation ▸ Review outline application ▸ Review panel meeting 1 ▸ Review full application ▸ Review panel meeting 2 ▸ 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 used in the process.

General starting points and principles

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

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). As a panel member, you are obliged 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.

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

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receive the same average grant amount, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant". Against this background, before adopting its proposal for allocation of grants, review panels shall consider the gender equality goal and follow up the success rates, as well as considering and if necessary commenting on the outcome. In the review of call for research environment grant interdisciplinary research 2021 gender equality is a borderline condition, and when ranking applications of equal quality during the panel meeting, applications from the under-represented gender shall be prioritised. However, during the individual grading, prioritizing and ranking gender equality must not be considered, only overall scientific quality.

Confidentiality

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

Prisma

All the review work is carried out in the web-based system Prisma. In order to carry out the review work in Prisma, you must register as a user in the system – 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 (Emilie.SorasAntila@vr.se).

Roles and responsibilities in the review process

Chair and vice chair

The role of the chair is to lead and coordinate the work of the panel, and in collaboration with the Swedish Research Council personnel to ensure that rules and policies are complied with. The chair will allocate applications to the reviewers, and is responsible for ensuring that the final statements issued by the review panel reflect the panel discussion and assessment. Normally, the chair does not review any applications her-/himself, but shall in order to acquire the necessary overview read all applications reviewed by the panel.

If the chair has conflict of interest on an application, the panel chair in consultation with the Swedish Research Council personnel may appoint a temporary vice chair. The vice chair tasks involve replacing the chair of the review panel in situations where she/he cannot or should not take part, such as when the chair has a conflict of interest.

Panel member

The tasks of the panel members are to review, grade and rank the applications assigned to the review panel. The review panel shall also discuss applications during the review panel meeting, and give feedback in the form of a final statement to applicants whose applications have been discussed. The final statements will represent a background for the funding decisions made by the Director General.

As panel member you will be assigned proposals to review. As reviewer and panel member you may then have either of two roles: rapporteur or reviewer. Both roles read and review the applications but as rapporteur you have extra responsibilities. These involve presenting the application at the review panel meetings, writing a first draft of a statement, to summarize assessments from the other reviewers and the panel discussions into a final statement. As a panel member you are also expected to give suggestions for external reviewers.

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 board's intentions for the review. The Swedish Research Council personnel do not participate in the review work.

Secretary General

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

1. CALL AND PREPARATION

Call and preparation ＞ Review outline application ＞ Review panel meeting 1 ＞ Review full application ＞ Review panel meeting 2 ＞ 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 review panel via Prisma. Thereafter, the panel chair allocates the applications to the members of the panel.

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. The address you state must be your home address, not to your university or institution. You must also decide whether you want to receive remuneration for your review work. If so, you must provide payment information and upload a copy of your passport. There are detailed instructions for how to do this in Prisma's User Manual.

Reporting any conflict of interest

Once the applications are allocated to your review panel have become available to you as a reviewer in Prisma, you must report any conflict of interest as soon as possible. Only when all panel members have reported any conflict of interest can the chair allocate applications to individual members. It is a good idea to communicate to the chair and the Research Council personnel if any doubt arises, or on issues of conflict of interest. If you discover later on in the process that you have a conflict of interest, this must also be reported to the chair and the research officer responsible. In such cases another reviewer will take over the reviewer tasks.

Allocation of applications to reviewers

Each application will be allocated to at least three reviewers, one rapporteur and two further reviewers. The rapporteur is the reviewer who is responsible for presenting the application for discussion at the panelmeeting, and for summarising the review panel final statement following the second review panel meeting.

In this type of panel, where a limited number of experts will review applications from many different scientific areas, you need to be prepared to review applications outside your own core expertise. The reviews from external experts will be used in some cases for extra assistance. In step 2 all applications will be evaluated by at least two external reviewers.

Planning and preparation ahead of the review panel meeting

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

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Summary of your tasks
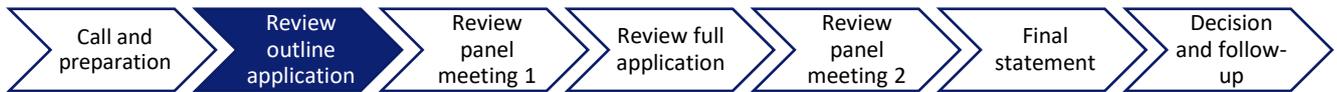
☐   Create an account/update account information in Prisma

☐   Report any conflict of interest as instructed by email

☐   Assess your conditions to participate in a digital panel meeting

2. REVIEW OUTLINE APPLICATION

| Call and preparation | Review outline application | Review panel meeting 1 | Review full application | Review panel meeting 2 | Final statement | Decision and follow-up |

Throughout the review process, you will receive instructions via email when it is time to carry out the various steps of the review work. The review of the applications will be executed in two steps. In the first step, an outline application will be reviewed where the panel's task will be to suggest which applicants to be invited to submit a full application in step two. The applications that will not be invited to submit a full application will instead be provided two grades jointly agreed on by the panel together with a standard statement formulated by the Secretary General.

Individual review

Each outline application shall be reviewed and graded by at least three members of the review panel. Each outline application consists of a three-page project outline, a one page description of the interdisciplinary added value of the project, a one-page publication list, and a CV.

The applications can be accessed through Prisma, and in this first step you will be asked to provide a grade for each of the two criteria, as well as a **recommendation** on a three-graded scale how the application should be treated at the first panel meeting (1=should be sifted, 2=should be discussed at the meeting, 3=should be accepted to submit full proposal). Typically, applications with a low grade on the critera interdisciplinary added value are not accepted for a full application.

The grades and recommendation are submitted in a separate Excel-document outside the Prisma system as instructed by the Swedish Research Council personnel. No written statements are required in this step. Your review shall be based on the application contents. Information that is irrelevant to the review should not be used. Examples of irrelevant information are details of the proposed visiting researcher's private life, various types of rumours, such as lack of research ethics or assumptions that someone else might have written the application.

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

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 further investigated.

Evaluation criteria and guiding questions for the outline application

Your review of the outline applications shall be based on two evaluation criteria Novelty and originality, and interdisciplinary added value. The criteria are evaluated against a seven-point grading scale (as detailed below). To facilitate the evaluation, there are guiding questions to be taken into account in the evaluation work. Please observe that the grading scale is an ordinal scale, where it is not possible to specify differences or distances between the values.

Guiding questions

Novelty and originality

- To what extent does the project address new interesting scientific questions?

- To what extent does the proposed research environment show potential for research breakthroughs and ground-breaking research?

- To what extent does the research, through its approach and collaboration, have the potential to open the way to new research fields and research approaches?

Interdisciplinary added value

- To what extent does the applicant show that the proposed research environment is a new multi-disciplinary grouping with researchers from genuinely differing scientific backgrounds, and from genuinely differing disciplines?

- To what extent does the research task defined in the application require collaboration between the applicants in order to succeed?

- Is the research task defined in the application greater and more challenging than the applicants could address if they were working individually and separately?

- In what way does the collaboration between the applicants create synergy effects, and how do the applicants' differing competences contribute to added value for research, both in the separate research fields and in the interdisciplinary field?

A seven-grade scale is used to evaluate the criteria:

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**

For both 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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Summary of your tasks

- □ **Grade** and provide **recommendation** if an outline application should be, sifted (grade 1), discussed (grade 2) or accepted to submit a full application (grade 3)

- □ Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur.

- □ 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.

- □ Contact the Scientific Research Council immediately if you suspect that there may be deviations from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.

- □ Identify at least two potential external experts that are suitable to review the full application

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3. REVIEW PANEL MEETING 1

| Call and preparation | Review outline application | Review panel meeting 1 | Review full application | Review panel meeting 2 | Final statement | Decision and follow-up |

At the first meeting, the most important task of the review panel is to identify the applications that are assessed as unlikely to receive funding and to screen these out from further review. First the applications are reported on and discussed, using the grading done by you and the other panel members ahead of the meeting as the starting point. The review panel will also work out joint grades for the two criteria for each application. The panel will then decide which applications will be taken forward to the next review stage and which will be screened out at stage one.

Discussion on applications

The applications are discussed based on the individual review carried out before the meeting, considering the recommendation as well as the two criteria used in the review[1]. The chair leads the discussion of an application, which as a rule starts with the rapporteur presenting the strengths and weaknesses of the application, followed by the other reviewers of the application giving their assessment. For each application the panel shall agree on a grade for Novelty and Originality as well as a grade for Interdisciplinary added value at the meeting. The reviewers of an application should prepare for the discussion by reading the assessments and grades given by the other reviewers for the applications they will be discussing.

The review panel has equal responsibility for each application reviewed by the panel, and each one shall be evaluated based on its own merits. Irrelevant information shall not be discussed. At the same time, the panel's applications shall compete with each other on equal terms. No application may therefore be given a higher or lower grade because it belongs within a certain subject area. Nor shall the panel carry out any quota-based allocation between the scientific disciplines included in the panel. It is also important that an application/applicant receives a new assessment each time of applying, and that all applications are assessed in the same way. For this reason, the review panel will not have access to any previous applications or assessments.

It is a good idea to be aware 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 shall keep track of the time.

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

Sifting

Once all applications have been discussed and the panel has agreed on a grade for Novelty and Originality as well as a grade for Interdisciplinary added value for each application, the panel shall carry out a preliminary ranking of the applications and decide on which applications should be invited for full application (max 35 applications). Depending on the distribution of the remaining applicants, the allocation of reviewers for stage two in the review might have to be adjusted to even the workload.

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[1] Depending on the number of the applications, it might happen that not all applications are discussed at the meeting. The panel chair together with the personnel of the Swedish Research Council might provide a suggestion on which applications should be discussed in detail ahead of the meeting. The suggestions will be based on your gradings and recommendations.

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Summary of the tasks of the first review panel meeting

☐ Agree on a proposal for which applications to screen out and which to take forward to stage two.

☐ Decide on grades for Novelty and Originality as well as a grade for Interdisciplinary added value for screened-out applications.

4. REVIEW FULL APPLICATION

| Call and preparation | Review outline application | Review panel meeting 1 | **Review full application** | Review panel meeting 2 | Final statement | Decision and follow-up |

The outline applications that receive the highest grade and recommendation will be invided to submit a full application. The full applications have longer research plan and a longer publication list.

Individual evaluation

In the second step, you are expected to read the full applications allocated to you, write evaluations (assessment or preliminary statement), grade all evaluation criteria and rank the applications reviewed by you. Each application will be reviewed and graded by at least three members of the review panel; one rapporteur and two reviewers. The starting point is that the same three reviewers that reviewed the outline applications also will review the full application; however, the outcome of the first step may call for re-allocation of some applications. For the applications where you will become the rapporteur you will be expected to write a preliminary statement, which shall consist of a numerical grade and detailed written comments on all evaluation criteria.

In the role as reviewer, you are expected to write an assessment, which shall also consist of a numerical grade and written comments, but here the comments do not have to be as detailed as when acting as rapporteur. The preliminary statemens and assessments will be submitted through the Prisma system.

For the applications where you are one of the reviewers, your task at this stage also includes evaluating the budgets, and as a rapporteur, you should also prepare a proposal for the grant amounts (see section below). For the applications where you are not a reviewer or rapporteur, you should read the applications and the external assessments before the panel meeting (without providing any grades or comments).

External reviewers

All applications in the second step will be reviewed by at least two external reviewers. The use of external reviewers means that the panel members may be asked to provide several suggestions of external reviewers who are suitable to review specific applications, and you may be asked several times if the suggested reviewers decline the invitation. To avoid potential conflicts of interest, it is best if the external reviewers are from outside of Sweden. In normal cases, the research officer responsible at the Swedish Research Council will contact the external reviewers proposed by the panel. The external review should be completed by late October, in order to give the review panel members time to read the assessments of the external reviewers before the second panel meeting.

Assessment of project budgets

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

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application. The assessment shall include costs for salaries, premises, operating costs and depreciation of equipment, and other costs that the applicant has indicated. All items should be justified in order to facilitate the assessment. In particular, consider whether there are elements in the budget that stand out, such as unreasonable or unjustified costs. Evaluate also whether the activity level of the project participants is reasonable in relation to the research task. You shall not weigh in the level of indirect costs in your assessment. Please note that the assessment of the budget shall be separate from the evaluation of the scientific quality of the project.

Evaluation criteria and guiding questions for the full application

Your review shall be based on five evaluation criteria which are evaluated against a seven- or three-point grading scale (as detailed below), and are intended to reflect the application's "quality profile". To facilitate the evaluation of the various criteria, there are also a number of guiding questions to be considered in the evaluation work. As for the outline application, please observe that the grading scale is an ordinal scale, where it is not possible to specify differences or distances between the values.

Scientific quality of the proposed research (1 – 7)

- Do the scientific questions aim to develop ground-breaking interdisciplinary research, and is the project design of sufficient quality to achieve or significantly approach this goals?
- To what extent are the design of the project and its questions of the highest scientific quality?
- To what extent is the project description sufficiently clear and systematic, for example in its definition of the research problem, its theoretical basis, and the summary of previous results within the research area?
- To what extent is the proposed research design suitable for achieving the aims of the project?
- To what extent are the methods for any data collection and analysis well described and suitable?

Novelty and originality (1 – 7)

- Does the project have the potential to significantly advance the frontiers of the research field or fill in clear knowledge gaps within the research field?
- Does the project generate or explore new research areas?
- Does the proposed project define new, interesting scientific questions? Does the project contain entirely novel ways and methods to approach scientific issues?
- To what extent does the project show a clear progression and new thinking in relation to previous research?
- To what extent does the project include new ways of combining theories, methods, factual knowledge and/or data from different disciplines for approaching important scientific questions?

Merits of the applicant (1 – 7)

- To what extent do the project participants have sufficient research experience and expertise within the area the application relates to?
- To what extent has the previous research conducted by the project participants contributed new knowledge within the research area?
- To what extent have the project participants displayed an ability for independent and creative scientific work?
- How good are the project participants' scientific production, impact and other merits in a national and international perspective, in relation to the research area and the project participants' career ages?
- To what extent do the project participants have the relevant and supplementary competence required to carry out the research task?

- To what extent does the applicant (in the event the application includes doctoral students) have any experience of supervising doctoral students?
- To what extent does the applicant have any experience of leading major research projects or research environments?

Feasibility (1 – 3)

- To what extent is the design of the project realistic, including the time plan?
- Is there access to competence, materials, equipment, research infrastructure and other resources required for the implementation of the project?
- Have the permits required to implement the project been obtained, or is there a statement on how these permits are applied for?
- Is the division of work and collaboration between the participants in the project clearly described?
- How good is the balance between the feasibility and risks of the project and its potential gains? (High risk/high gain)

Interdisciplinary added value (1-7)

- To what extent does the applicant show that the proposed research environment is a new interdisciplinary grouping with researchers from genuinely differing scientific backgrounds, and from genuinely differing disciplines?
- To what extent does the research task defined in the application require collaboration between the applicants in order to succeed?
- Is the research task defined in the application greater and more challenging than the applicants could address if they were working individually and separately?
- In what way does the collaboration between the applicants create synergy effects, and how do the applicants' differing competences contribute to added value for research, both in the separate research fields and in the interdisciplinary field?
- Does the applicant describe convincingly how the combination of theories, methods, factual knowledge and/or data from the different disciplines can be expected to lead to ground-breaking knowledge?
- Does the applicant describe convincingly how the project participants plan to jointly build up, develop and manage the interdisciplinary research environment?
- To what extent will the proposed project strengthen and increase the quality of research within the research areas in question at the HEI/s, and also in Sweden and internationally?

Overall grade (1–7)

The above subsidiary criteria are weighed together into an overall grade, which reflects the review panel's joint evaluation of the application's scientific quality. The overall grade is not the same as an average grade or a summary of the subsidiary evaluations; instead, it shall reflect the 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. As a guidance for the review panel's assessment, the novelty and originality as well as the interdisciplinary added value are the two most important criteria.

Grading scales

A **seven-grade scale** is used to evaluate the criteria scientific quality of the proposed research, novelty and originality and the merits of the applicant, as well as the criterion scientific quality of the outline application.

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 weakness	1

A **three-grade scale** is used for the criterion feasibility:

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.

Ranking of full applications

You shall also rank each specific application in relation to all the other applications you have reviewed. This is also done in Prisma after the you submit your grades. The ranking serves as an important supplement to the grading when the review panel's applications are compared with each other. 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). Ahead of the review panel meeting, all individual rankings of all the reviewers are weighed together into a preliminary joint ranking for each application. For more detailed instructions, please see Prisma's User Manual.

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Summary of your tasks

- □ 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)

- □ As rapporteur: Prepare for the panel meeting by reading other panel members' comments as well as the external reviews and by preparing a short presentation of the strengths and weaknesses of the applications

- □ Prepare for the second panel meeting by reading all applications in stage two and the assessments from the external reviewers

- □ Make proposals for the budget to award for all applications for which you are the rapporteur. Prepare to present this at the second panel meeting.

- □ 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

- □ Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct

5. REVIEW PANEL MEETING 2

| Call and preparation | Review outline application | Review panel meeting 1 | Review full application | **Review panel meeting 2** | Final statement | Decision and follow-up |

At the review panel meeting, the applications will be reported on and discussed on the basis of the individual grading and ranking as the starting point. The review panel will agree on joint grades for the sub-criteria as well as an overall grade for each application. The review panel is also expected to provide a list of priority for the expected number of proposals to be funded[2], supplemented by a number of reserves in priority order. During and after the review panel meeting, panel members are also encouraged to provide feedback on the review process.

Discussion on applications

The applications are discussed based on the individual review carried out before the meeting, and considering the five evaluation criteria used in the review. You should prepare for the discussion by reading all applications where you do not have a conflict of interest and the assessments from the external reviewers. The chair leads the discussion of an application, which as a rule starts with the rapporteur presenting the external assessments and the strengths and weaknesses of the application, followed by the other reviewers of the application giving their assessment. The chair is responsible for including any assessments from external reviewers in the discussion. For each application discussed at the meeting, the panel shall agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade. It is important that the rapporteur for each application takes notes to prepare for the task of formulating the panel's final statement. Please note that the final statement is not the statement of the assigned rapporteur; it is the collective statement of the panel. The reviewers of an application should prepare for the discussion by reading the assessments and grades given by the other reviewers for the applications they will be discussing.

The review panel has equal responsibility for each application reviewed by the panel, and each one shall be evaluated based on its own merits. Irrelevant information shall not be discussed. At the same time, the panel's applications shall compete with each other on equal terms. No application may therefore be given a higher or lower grade because it belongs within a certain subject area. Nor shall the panel carry out any quota-based allocation between the scientific disciplines included in the panel. It is also important that an application/applicant receives a new assessment each time of applying, and that all applications are assessed in the same way. For this reason, the review panel will not have access to any previous applications or assessments.

It is important for the panel to remember that the meeting time is limited, and that there will be many applications to discuss. Therefore, it will be important to find a balance between quality of assessment and the time allocated. The chair and the Swedish Research Council personnel will help to keep track of the time.

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

Prioritising

Once all applications have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on an overall grade for each application, the panel shall carry out a prioritisation of the applications with the highest scientific quality. This prioritisation

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[2] 6-10 grants will be awarded under this call. In addition, 1-2 grants for interdisciplinary research into antimicrobial resistance may be awarded.

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shall conclude with the review panel's proposal for applications to be awarded grants within the panel's budgetary framework. The prioritisation list shall also include a number of reserves, covering the applications that fall immediately outside the panel's budget framework. Reserves are necessary, as it does happen that project leaders cannot accept their grants.

Special conditions

For the grant Interdisciplinary research environment, 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 shall not be applied by individual reviewers in their work ahead of the review panel meeting. Special conditions that impact on the prioritisation but are not part of the evaluation of scientific quality shall not be weighed into the grading.

Proposal for budget

The review panel as a whole is responsible for the evaluation and proposal for budget for each application. At the meeting, the panel shall agree on a proposed grant amount to award to each prioritised application. The budget discussion goes hand in hand with the prioritisation discussion, as the number of applications that can be prioritised within the review panel's budget framework is dependent on the proposed project budgets. The rapporteur opens the budget discussion with his or her proposal, and a justification for the proposal. The review panel then discusses the budget and agrees on a reasonable project budget range. Please note that the assessment of the project costs should not affect the evaluation of the scientific quality of the project.

Feedback

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

Summary of the tasks of the review panel

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

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

- ☐ Agree on a priority list with reserves

- ☐ Agree on a budget for each prioritised application

- ☐ Contribute with feedback on the review process

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6. FINAL STATEMENT

| Call and preparation | Review outline application | Review panel meeting 1 | Review full application | Review panel meeting 2 | **Final statement** | Decision and follow-up |

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

The rapporteur writes a final statement

Following the review panel meeting, you are responsible for writing the panel's final statement on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. The preliminary statement you have entered into Prisma ahead of the review panel meeting shall 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 discussed during the panel meeting. You should therefore go back to your notes from the panel meeting, so that the final statement includes all opinions. As rapporteur, you have one week in which to enter your final statements in Prisma following the end of the review panel meeting.

The chair reviews all final statements

Once the final statements have been entered into Prisma, the chair and the senior research officer read them. The chair is responsible for ensuring the final statements on the applications discussed at the review panel meeting reflect the panel's discussion, and that the written justifications correspond to the grades. It is not the task of the chair to carry out comprehensive editing. As a panel member, you may therefore be asked, in conjunction with the chair's review, to supplement or adjust a final statement.

General advice and recommendations on final statements

The final statement shall reflect the review panel's joint overall evaluation, including any external assessments. The final statement is part of the material that forms the basis for the decision by the Scientific Council and shall help the applicant understand the grounds for the review panel's assessment. It is therefore very important that it is of high quality and 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 use a language that is constructive and objective**.

Do not
- Do not include a long summary about the proposed visiting researcher 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.

Summary of your tasks

☐ Write the review panel's final statement in Prisma on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur

☐ As necessary, supplement final statements following review by the chair

☐ Submit receipts for any expenses to the panel's research officer responsible

7. DECISION AND FOLLOW-UP

Call and preparation › Review outline application › Review panel meeting 1 › Review full application › Review panel meeting 2 › Final statement › **Decision and follow-up**

The final step in the process is the grant decision itself. The Director General of the Swedish Research Council decides on the applications to be awarded or refused, based on the review panels' proposals.

Decision

The board of the Swedish Research Council has delegated the decision on grants within the grant type Interdisciplinary Research Environments to the Director General. The Director General's decision is based on the priority lists (including reserves) offered by the review panel. The decision is then published shortly thereafter on vr.se and and will simultaneously be communicated to the applicants in the Prisma system.

Follow-up

Following each review batch, an internal follow-up is also carried out of the process and the outcome. An important starting point for this follow-up is the feedback you provide as a panel member in conjunction with the review panel meeting. 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. All complaints or wishes about clarification shall be registered and then handled by the Secretary General responsible in consultation with the chair and senior research officer of the review panel. If necessary, the chair may contact you as a panel member for further information.

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

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8. CHECKLIST

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

1. Call and preparation

☐ Grade and provide recommendation if an outline application should be accepted to submit a full application

☐ 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.

☐ Contact the Scientific Research Council immediately if you suspect that there may be deviations from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.

2. Review outline applications

☐ **Grade** and provide **recommendation** if an outline application should be, sifted (grade 1), discussed (grade 2) or accepted to submit a full application (grade 3)

☐ Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur.

☐ 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.

☐ Contact the Scientific Research Council immediately if you suspect that there may be deviations from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.

☐ Identify at least two potential external experts that are suitable to review the full application

3. Review panel meeting 1

☐ Agree on a proposal for which applications to screen out and which to take forward to stage two.

☐ Decide on grades for Novelty and Originality as well as a grade for Interdisciplinary added value for screened-out applications.

4. Review full applications

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□ 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)

□ As rapporteur: Prepare for the panel meeting by reading other panel members' comments as well as the external reviews and by preparing a short presentation of the strengths and weaknesses of the applications

□ Prepare for the second panel meeting by reading all applications in stage two and the assessments from the external reviewers

□ Make proposals for the budget to award for all applications for which you are the rapporteur. Prepare to present this at the second panel meeting.

□ 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

5. Review panel meeting 2

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

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

☐ Agree on a priority list with reserves

☐ Agree on a budget for each prioritised application

☐ Contribute with feedback on the review process

6. Final statement

☐ Write the review panel's final statement in Prisma on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur

☐ As necessary, supplement final statements following review by the chair

☐ Submit receipts for any expenses to the panel's research officer responsible

7. Decision and follow-up

□ Refer any questions about the evaluation of individual applications to the Swedish Research Council's personnel

□ Be prepared to assist the chair and the Secretary General responsible in the event of any questions

Appendix 1:
The Swedish Research Council´s principles and guidelines for peer review

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

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

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

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

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

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

Excerpt from the Board Minutes dated 15 November 2015.

   1. **Expertise in the review**

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The assessment of applications shall be carried out by reviewers with documented high scientific[3] 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.

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.

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[3] Or artistic competence when relevant.

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.

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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[4]

- 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.[5]

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.

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[4] This is a translation of the adopted Swedish version of the conflict of interest policy. In the event of conflict between the Swedish version and this English version, the former shall take precedence.
[5] 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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- 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.
- 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.

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Part 2:
The Swedish Research Council's guidelines for managing conflicts of interest[6]

▪ 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)

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

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

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

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

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

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

The managing of conflict of interest is regulated as follows:

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

3. Preventing conflict of interest situations

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

Information on conflict of interest circumstances

- A person who is aware of any circumstance that may mean he or she has a disqualifying conflict of interest shall voluntarily and immediately inform the Swedish Research Council of this circumstance.
- Employees of the Swedish Research Council should provide information regarding disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances to their immediate superior. When handling applications for research funding, the information should instead be given to the administrative officer responsible.

- Appointed reviewers and elected review panel members should in the first instance inform about disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances to the administrative officer responsible, and in the second instance to the chair of the review panel, or the chair of the scientific council, council or committee.

Specifically regarding matters relating to applications for research funding

- All who take part in the handling of applications for research funding shall provide information on any disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances relating to applicants and participating researchers listed in

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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 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

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

6. Communication and information about conflict of interest issues

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

- All employees shall be informed of the conflict of interest policy and the guidelines for the managing conflicts of interest.
- All new employees shall have the opportunity to discuss the meaning of the conflict of interest policy and guidelines as part of their work introduction.
- Administrative officers involved in the review of applications shall be given the opportunity to discuss conflicts of interest and the current procedures for managing such conflicts before and after the application review, in order to raise suggestions for ways to improve the work.
- The conflict of interest policy should be included in the reviewer handbooks.
- The conflict of interest policy and the guidelines shall be communicated to the scientific councils, councils and committees, and to review panel chairs and review panel members.
- The Chief Legal Officer shall have overall responsibility for the Swedish Research Council's management of conflict of interest issues.

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

Goals for achieving gender equality at the Swedish Research Council

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

The Swedish Research Council shall:

1. achieve and maintain an equal gender distribution in its review panels;
2. ensure that the percentages of female and male applicants for grants from the Swedish Research Council correspond to the percentages of women and men among the potential research grant applicants;

3. ensure that women and men have the same success rates[7] and receive the same average grant amounts, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant[8];
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)[9].
Unless otherwise specified, the Director General is responsible for advancing the efforts towards achieving equality.

Introduction

This strategy applies to the Swedish Research Council as a research funding body. A special equal opportunities plan addresses the work of achieving equality within the Swedish Research Council as a public agency.
The primary objective of the Swedish Research Council is to allocate funding to research of the highest scientific quality and that best promotes innovation. Achieving this objective requires impartial assessment of grant applications. Impartial assessment implies gender neutrality; the Swedish Research Council shall support the best researchers, regardless of gender.
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.

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[7]Attainment of the goal must of course be assessed in the context of a sufficiently large number of decisions.
[8]Success rates for women and men refer to the percentage of applications approved among total applications received from women and men respectively.
[9]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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According to the Swedish Research Council's Instructions Ordinance (2009:975) Section 1 Item 14, the Swedish Research Council must promote equality between women and men within its sphere of activity. In accordance with the requirements established by its government directive, the goals achieved must be presented in the annual reports of the Swedish Research Council.

Processes for achieving goals

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

1.1 Equal gender distribution in Swedish Research Council review panels

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

In this context, equal gender distribution is considered to exist in a panel when neither of the sexes comprises less than 40 % of the panel members.
Gender distribution should be considered before appointing review panels, not least with respect to the chair positions. Work involving equality should take a long-term perspective. This means, for example, that in certain areas where women or men are greatly underrepresented among teachers and researchers at higher education institutions, the Swedish Research Council must be observant not to over-utilise those few women or men.
If the composition of a review panel, or review panel chair proposed to a Scientific Council, Council or Committee falls outside of the 40 % to 60 % range, this must be specified in the documentation prepared for the decision. This documentation must also include a justification for the deviation and describe the actions taken to achieve an equal gender distribution.
Gender equality aspects should also be considered when appointing participants to other groups and when making decisions concerning Swedish Research Council representation on external (national and international) bodies.

2. Grant application rates by women and men

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

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

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3. 3. Same success rates for women and men

"The Swedish Research Council should ensure that women and men have the same success rates4 and receive the same average size of grants, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant."[10] *(Goal 3).*

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

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

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

The Swedish Research Council's review handbooks must include written instructions for the review panels, giving attention to the following:

that all evaluation criteria must be clear and explicit. When the call is issued, the criteria and the instructions for applicants must be published on the Swedish Research Council's website; *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-

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[10] See Note 1.

making, where relevant and possible. Direct and eventual indirect consequences for gender balance should be discussed in each analysis and evaluation. In those cases where a gender equality perspective has been deemed not possible or relevant, a specific justification should be given.

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

5. A gender equality perspective in external communications

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

A gender equality perspective shall be integrated in the Research Council's external communications in all communication channels; it should also be clear in relevant contexts that the Swedish Research Council works to attain gender equality. The external image conveyed by the Swedish Research Council shall be gender-neutral in other respects too, and not reinforce gender stereotypes of, for example, researchers or subject areas. A statement of how the Research Council has fulfilled this objective should be provided annually to the Board, at the latest when the annual report is submitted to the Government.

Appendix 4:
Ethics Principles: Permits/Approvals, and Good Research Practice

The administrative organisation[11] 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.

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[11] 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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1.2 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.

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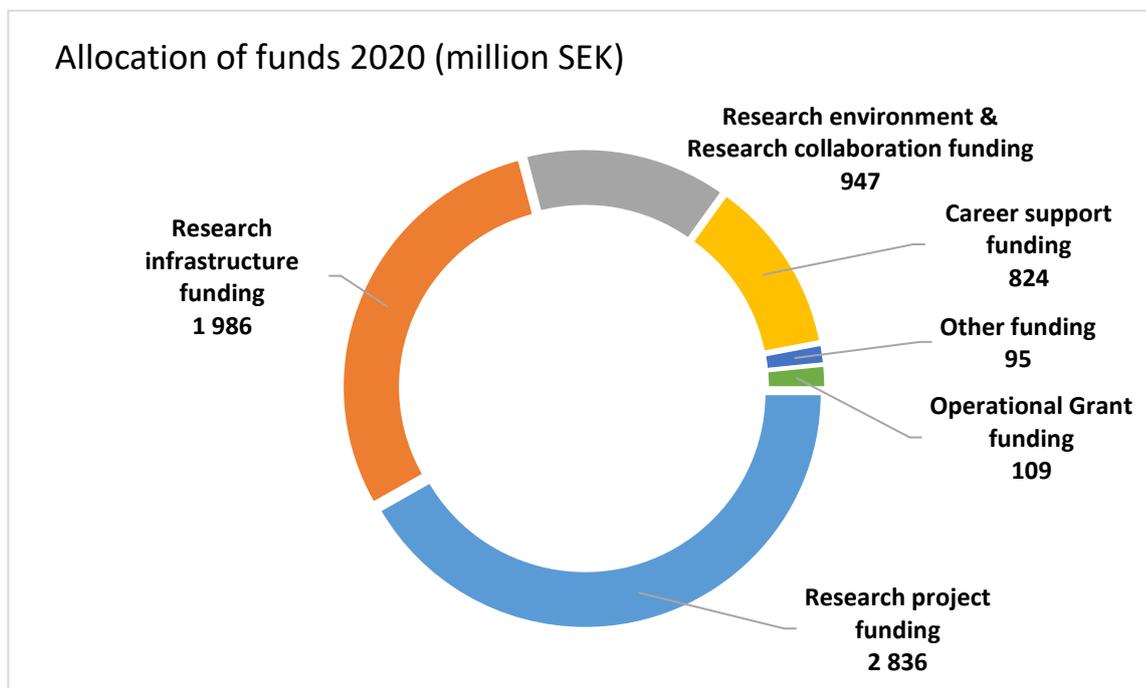
In addition to funding research, the Swedish Research Council is also responsible for communication about research and research results. The Council is also tasked with preparing analyses relating to research policy, acting an advisor to the Government on research policy issues evaluating research and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