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# Guidelines for reviewers of Swedish Environmental Protection Agency research calls - projects and syntheses

## Content

1. Introduction .....	1
2. The task of the review panel.....	1
3. The PRISMA system.....	1
4. The process in short.....	2
5. Conflict of interest and competence.....	2
5.1. Principles for conflict of interest.....	2
6. Remuneration .....	2
7. Individual assessment and grading.....	3
8. Criteria to review.....	4
8.1. Criteria and statements for Scientific reviewers .....	4
8.2. Criteria and statements for Relevance reviewers.....	5
9. Grading of proposals .....	5
10. The use of AI in reviewing .....	6
11. The rapporteur role .....	6
12. The review panel meeting.....	6
13. Final written statements .....	6

## 1. Introduction

We welcome you as a reviewer of applications submitted to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Swedish EPA)!

These guidelines include information on the evaluation procedure. With your support we aim to allocate the Swedish EPA's research funds to applications with high scientific quality and high practical relevance.

## 2. The task of the review panel

The Swedish EPA relies on a review panel of both scientific and relevance experts. The scientific experts evaluate the scientific quality, and the relevance experts review the practical relevance to the work of the Swedish EPA and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM), mainly aiming at [Sweden's Environmental Objectives](#).

## 3. The PRISMA system

Applications and evaluations are performed in the web-based system PRISMA: <https://prisma.research.se/>. At the PRISMA website you will find all the applications assigned to your panel, the review forms, and all other relevant information you need.

You need to have a *personal account* to be able to log into the system. To create an account, information and general instructions are available in the PRISMA [user manual](#). Please notify us when you have created your account or let us know if you already have one. There are also FAQs and technical support available if you cannot find your answer in the user manual.

#### 4. The process in short

- All panel members and the chair create a personal account in PRISMA.
- All panel members and chair indicate conflict of interest and competence for all applications in PRISMA.
- Claim remuneration for your work.
- Individual assessments in PRISMA (1-2 months).
- When individual assessments have been completed, assessments will be visible to all panel members.
- Rapporteurs prepare summaries.
- A two-day panel meeting.
- The written statements are finalised at the panel meeting.
- The funding decision is made by the Swedish EPA's Director General.

#### 5. Conflict of interest and competence

All panel members and the chair must declare conflict of interest for each application. You will find all applications under the tab "REVIEW". Choose "call X" and click on "Review tasks". If realised later, conflict of interest can be declared at any point of the evaluation procedure. Conflict of interest should be declared towards all participants of the proposal who will receive funding. Please open the full application and read the budget section and the CV section to see all project members and their affiliations.

You also need to indicate your competence to review each application. A 3 equals high competence, a 2 means medium competence and a 1 signifies low competence.

When you have reported conflict of interest and competence for all applications, click Submit. Deadline: see dates in Prisma.

##### 5.1. Principles for conflict of interest

In case of having a conflict of interest for a certain proposal, you cannot evaluate it or be present at the panel meeting when the proposal is discussed. Possible conflicts of interest may be any situation that compromises impartiality, i.e. involvement in preparation of proposal, benefitting directly from the project, close research collaboration with the applicants, superior, subordinate or instructor of the applicant, having close family relationships etc. An appropriate time limit for when a research collaboration should no longer be considered to affect the objectivity is 5 years after the collaboration has been concluded. Please, read the [Guidelines for the Swedish EPA conflict of interest](#) which you also find on the PRISMA Bulletin Board.

An external reviewer will be called upon in cases where most panel members have low competence and/or conflict of interest. The external reviewer will contribute with a written statement that will be used as a guide and support the panel on the review of the application. The external reviewer does not participate in the panel meeting but can be consulted if necessary. The principles for conflicts of interest also apply to external reviewers.

#### 6. Remuneration

To proceed with the review process, you need to fill in the remuneration settings. Please do this as soon as possible so that we can start and complete administrative

management with the Swedish Tax Agency. Click on Remuneration settings and choose one of the following options:

- Decline remuneration – if you do not want or are not allowed to accept any remuneration for your work in the panel. Reviewers of practical relevance do not get remunerated.
- Accept remuneration – Fill in or update payment information. The remuneration will be paid to your bank account. Note that the process of payment may take up to six months.
  - Swedish residents enter their bank account and personal identification number. If you choose Sweden as Bank country, a tax of 30% will automatically be deducted unless you put another percentage.
  - Non-Swedish residents enter their bank details, IBAN, SWIFT/BIC, and personal identification number TIN. Also, the page of your passport that contains your photograph and personal details must be scanned, saved, and uploaded.

## 7. Individual assessment and grading

All applications will be reviewed by both scientific and relevance reviewers based on the Swedish EPA criteria.

On the right-hand side of the PRISMA front page, under Bulletin board, you will find important documents that will help you in your panel work, e.g. the call text, guidelines for reviewers, and conflicts of interest. After the call deadline, you will get access to all applications in PRISMA. The applications to review will be assigned to you. The PRISMA system sends you a note on these assignments.

Click on the menu option Review tasks. All your assigned applications are listed here. In the Assignment column you can see the type of task you have to perform. When you open each application, you may click Preview at the top of the form and you can then view and download the application and fact sheet in PDF-format. To view additional information about an application you can either open the application by clicking Reg no. or by clicking Details.

There are two types of individual review tasks, either as a reviewer or as a rapporteur. When you are a reviewer you write your assessments and mark your grades in the form Assessment. When you are a rapporteur you write your assessments and mark your grades in the form Preliminary statement.

In your individual assessments you should consider each proposal separately. The basis for the assessment should be the call text and the main criteria for review (see below). The instructions for applicants may in some cases also be taken into consideration.

Reviewers should not compare or rank proposals during the individual assessment. For your assigned applications, you should:

- Open the assessment form by clicking Write next to the application. Write can be found in the end of the row.
- Develop your comments on each criterion. Give short informative comments on the strengths and/or weaknesses (in English). You will find a range of statements (see Criteria to review) as a support when developing your comments.
- Select grades (1-5) on each of the six evaluation criteria (see Grading proposals) corresponding to the explanatory comments (see Criteria to review).
- Set the overall grade for the application. This is not an average of the grades you have given to each criterion but rather an overall assessment of the application.
- Click Submit when you have completed your assessment.

The grades and the comments in the assessment forms are the panel's work material. This is not public and should be kept within Prisma. The comments aim to facilitate

the discussion at the panel meeting and to help the rapporteur to compose the final statements.

## **8. Criteria to review**

You will review according to the call text, which you will find on the Bulletin Board. There are statements to consider within each of the six criteria you review. The applicants write their applications according to the same six criteria. You may consider the statements for each criterion in your assessment. You may also consider other issues.

### ***8.1. Criteria and statements for Scientific reviewers***

*Criterion 1. Aims and expected results*

- Aims and objectives fit the call.
- Research questions are appropriate.
- Hypotheses are relevant (not relevant for syntheses).
- The research area is well described and founded in relevant theory (not relevant for syntheses).

*Criterion 2. Methods*

- The methods are clearly described, appropriate, and feasible.
- The work plan and work packages are well-defined, realistic, and suitable.
- Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary methods are appropriate (when relevant).

*Criterion 3. Practical relevance*

- Target groups, stakeholders, and end users are identified, and their needs are well described.
- The societal relevance is considered and relevant.

*Criterion 4. Communication*

- The communication plan including publications is appropriate and well-developed.
- The dissemination activities are adequate, realistic, and directed towards stakeholder groups.
- The involvement of target groups, stakeholders, and end users is well described, continuous, and interactive.
- Output from the project will be open and publicly available for both society and researchers.

*Criterion 5. Management and budget*

- Organisation and management are clearly described and suitable, including a realistic and appropriate time plan.
- The cooperation between participants is appropriate and the role of each participant is clear.
- Data management is clearly described and in accordance with open access.
- The total budget and the allocation of resources are reasonable and justified.
- Risks associated with budget or management plan are pointed out.

*Criterion 6. Competence*

- The project leader has the appropriate competence and experience.
- The research group is coherent and well composed to deliver the anticipated results.
- The scientific publications are appropriate and of high quality.
- The research group has useful national and international collaborators (when relevant).

*Criteria 1-6. Overall assessment*

- Describe the context and the logic between the criteria 1-6.
- Describe any possible risks associated with budget, management, or project plan.
- Specify your overall assessment of the project.

## ***8.2. Criteria and statements for Relevance reviewers***

### *Criterion 1. Aims and expected results*

- Aims and objectives fit the call.
- The expected results have an impact on current management practices.

### *Criterion 2. Methods*

- The work plan and work packages are well-defined and realistic.
- The methods are feasible for generating management-relevant output.

### *Criterion 3. Practical relevance*

- The research group demonstrates knowledge of frameworks, directives, and policies.
- Target groups, stakeholders, and end users are identified and well described.
- The needs of stakeholders and end users are clearly described.
- The results create timely, useful, and applicable knowledge to the Swedish EPA and/or SwAM with the potential to contribute to the environmental quality objectives and sustainable development.
- The expected results are useful to other public authorities (when relevant).

### *Criterion 4. Communication*

- The communication plan is appropriate and well-developed.
- The dissemination activities are adequate, realistic, and directed towards stakeholder groups.
- The involvement of target groups, stakeholders, and end users is well described, continuous, and interactive.
- Output from the project will be open and publicly available for both society and researchers.

### *Criterion 5. Management and budget*

- Organisation and management are clearly described and suitable.
- Data management is clearly described and suitable.
- The budget for activities coupled to the practical relevance is reasonable and justified.

### *Criterion 6. Competence*

- The project leader has relevant experience.
- The research group is coherent and well composed, with the competence to deliver policy-relevant results.

### *Criteria 1-6. Overall assessment*

- Describe the context and the logic between the criteria 1-6.
- Specify your overall assessment of the project.

## **9. Grading of proposals**

Each criterion is graded 1-5 based on the following interpretation:

- **5** Very high: the proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.
- **4** High: the proposal addresses the criterion very well although certain improvements are still possible.
- **3** Acceptable: the proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements

- would be necessary.
- **2 Low:** while the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
  - **1 Poor:** the criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

Based on the recommendation by the Swedish EPA's Scientific Advisory Board only applications with agreed overall grades of at least 4 and 5 on both scientific quality and relevance will be eligible for funding.

### **10. The use of AI in reviewing**

The use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT or similar) is not allowed when reviewing and evaluating applications. The assessment must be conducted by an expert reviewer based on their own scientific expertise. Also, uploading an application or related information to an AI tool poses risks of unauthorized data sharing, including confidentiality breaches and improper handling of personal data.

### **11. The rapporteur role**

Once all individual assessments are submitted, they will be made visible to all panel members in accordance with the dates specified in Prisma. At this stage, the rapporteur should summarise the other reviewers' assessments as preparation for the panel meeting. Scientific quality and practical relevance should be summarised separately.

### **12. The review panel meeting**

The review panel meeting is hosted by the Swedish EPA. The purpose of the review panel meeting is to discuss the applications, reach consensus on overall grades and statements for the applications, and determine a ranking of the applications.

The secretariat and the chair will conclude from the individual grades which proposals that should be discussed at the review panel meeting. Applications are discussed in the order decided by the chair.

The rapporteur introduces the application (4-5 minutes) and sometimes an appointed co-rapporteur does likewise. This summary, together with grades and comments, serves as a starting point for the discussion, in which all panel members can participate. The purpose of the discussion is to agree on a joint consensus grade for both scientific quality and practical relevance, reflecting the general quality of the application. In these discussions it is quite ok to change your point of view on an application.

When all applications have been discussed and have received revised and agreed overall grades, the next step is comparing and ranking. The basis for the ranking is the overall grades and, if applicable, focus areas as specified in the call text.

**Only applications with agreed overall grades of at least 4 and 5 on both scientific quality and practical relevance will be subject to ranking.**

Relevance takes precedence in the ranking priority. Thus, the priority order is: 5R+5S, 5R+4S, 4R+5S, 4R+4S (R = relevance, S = Science). According to the Swedish EPA's governmental appropriation the funds should be distributed so that equality between women and men is considered.

### **13. Final written statements**

Applications discussed at the review panel meeting will receive a written final statement that reflects key points and the final grade. The final statement will include an overall grade for scientific quality, an overall grade for practical relevance, and a written overall statement on the content and the scientific methods, as well as the practical relevance. The potential risks associated with budget, management, or project plan are also included in the statements. Statements should be brief, polite and to the point.

Rapporteurs will prepare final statements for their applications. Rapporteurs may use

AI-based tools for language editing of their written statements, provided that no sensitive content or personal data is shared.

The statement will then be discussed and revised by the whole panel. All panel members must agree on the final statement. The final statements will be registered in PRISMA during the review panel meeting. The statements will be communicated to the applicant once the formal decision is made. Applications that are not discussed at the review panel meeting will receive a statement written by the rapporteur.

The recommendations of the review panel meeting are summarised in an evaluation report, also including information on the review panel, conflicts of interest, the process of reviewing, final statements, and recommended ranking.

The final decision on financing will be made by the Swedish EPA Director General based on the evaluation report and the report from a meeting in the Environmental Research Council.

**Thank you** for supporting the Swedish EPA by reviewing applications.  
Good luck in your work, and do not hesitate to ask if you have questions!