

Guidance for reviewers of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency research calls

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

These guidelines are intended to give you a basic support in the review process. With your support we hope to be able to allocate the Swedish EPA's research funds to the highest scientific quality and most relevant research applications.

The task of the review panel

Swedish EPA relies on a review panel consisting of scientific and relevance experts. The scientific experts evaluate the grade of scientific quality and the relevance experts review the relevance to the Swedish EPA and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) for achieving the Sweden's Environmental Objectives.

The review processes

In general, the following steps are included:

1. Submission of proposals and all required documents to Swedish EPA. Swedish EPA will remove the ineligible applications.
2. Declaration of potential conflict of interest situations (See section Conflict of interest).
3. Individual evaluation by scientific reviewers based on the Swedish EPA criteria. Applications receiving scores 3, 4 and 5 as well as applications where the scientific reviewers disagree widely (from low to high points) will continue to a relevance review. Applications receiving lower scores are excluded from the procedure.
4. Individual evaluation by relevance reviewers based on the Swedish EPA criteria.
5. Review/consensus panel meetings hosted by the Swedish EPA in Stockholm for the scientific and the relevance experts to discuss the applications and score them based on a five-grade scale (See section Scoring of proposals). The scientific and relevance reviewers will together (in consensus at the panel meeting) propose a priority and provide a ranking list of the applications. An approval and rejection list are produced.
6. A draft evaluation report will be written during the panel meeting.
7. The final decision will be made by the Swedish EPA based on the final draft of the evaluation report.

Main criteria for quality

Main criteria for review of scientific quality:

Criteria 1. Research questions and theory

- 1.1. Purpose and questions raised
- 1.2. Theories and hypothesis
- 1.3. Novelty
- 1.4. Knowledge of the research area

Criteria 2. Methods

- 2.1. Methodology
- 2.2. Work plan

Criteria 3. Management

- 3.1. Organisation and management
- 3.2. Justified budget and allocation of resources
- 3.3. Scientific competence of the applicants (CV)

Criteria 4. Communication (No grading required, comments only)

- 4.1. Communication and dissemination activities

Main criteria for review of practical relevance:

Criteria 1. Relevance

- 1.1. Purpose and questions raised
- 1.2. Relevance to the call
- 1.3. Relevance to Swedish EPA/SwAM

Criteria 2: Management

- 2.1. Organisation, management and work plan
- 2.2. Justified budget and allocation of the resources

Criteria 3. Communication

- 4.1. Planned communication activities
- 4.2. Stakeholders and target groups identified
- 4.3. Use of the project results

Scoring of proposals

Each criterion is scored 0-5 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.

0 The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.

Based on the recommendation by the Swedish EPA's Scientific Advisory Board only proposals with overall score of 4 and 5 will be funded. The relevance is important in the ranking priority. The priority order is: 5R+5S, 5R+4S, 4R+5S, 4R+4S (R = relevance, S = Science).

The scoring procedure:

- First develop your comments on each criterion
- Then select scores accordingly: Each criterion is given a score out of five, corresponding to the explanatory comments
- The overall score is your final judgment on the application, not a sum or average of the individual scores. In the evaluation meeting, a joint score for each proposal will be agreed upon by the panel.

Conflict of interest

You must immediately inform the Swedish EPA Research Secretariat if you become aware of a conflict of interest including the following conditions:

- Been involved in preparation of proposal
- Benefitting directly from the project
- Have close research collaboration with the applicants
- Are superior, subordinate or instructor of the applicant
- Applying for the same post as the applicant
- Been director or governing board member of the organization applying
- Have close family relationship
- Any other situation that compromises impartiality

An absolute limit for when a research collaboration should no longer be considered to affect the objectivity is difficult to set, but an appropriate time limit is 5 years after the collaboration has been concluded.

In case of conflict of interest for a certain proposal, you cannot evaluate it or be present whenever the proposal is discussed.