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Guidelines for reviewers of the 2022 Swedish Environmental Protection Agency research calls for programmes

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1. Introduction

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

These guidelines include basic information on the evaluation procedure. Please read this carefully. With your support we hope to allocate the Swedish EPA's research funds to applications with the highest scientific quality and best 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 grade of scientific quality, and the relevance experts review the relevance to the work of the Swedish EPA and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM), 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 relevant information you need.

You need to *create a personal account* to be able to log into the system. In order to create an account, please follow the steps described [here](#). Please, fill in your data when the system asks for it, since the system gradually gives you further access. Please note us when you have created your account or if you already have one!

Additional PRISMA information and general instructions are available in the PRISMA [user manual](#). There are also FAQs and technical support available if you cannot find your answer in the user manuals.

4. The process in short

The 2022 programme call is performed in two stages.

Stage 1 (pre-proposal):

- All panel members and chair create a personal account in PRISMA as soon as possible.
- As soon as the call is closed (15 October): All panel members and chair indicate competence and conflict of interest for all applications in PRISMA.
- Individual assessments/reviews in PRISMA takes place (approximately one month). They are made in the template enclosed at the Bulletin Board in PRISMA and uploaded as a pdf when completed.
- After individual assessments completion: Assessments and preliminary statements are visible to all panel members.
- Based on the individual assessments: Priorities of the pre-proposals are registered in PRISMA.
- Two-day panel meeting takes place in Stockholm or digitally/by a virtual communication tool (November).
- Last day of panel meeting is the deadline to finalise the written statements; hereafter they will be approved by the chair.
- The decision to invite applicants to submit full proposals is made by the Swedish EPAs head of research unit based on the panel meeting recommendations.

Stage 2 (full proposals):

- Only successful pre-proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal.
- Full proposal writing (December to March).
- Individual assessments/reviews are performed in Prisma (approximately 1 month).
- There will be two rapporteurs assigned to each application, one relevance expert and one scientific expert.
- Two-day panel meeting takes place in Stockholm or digitally/by a virtual communication tool (April).
- The panel will produce a ranking list of all proposals and agree on two proposals to be recommended for funding.
- Last day of panel meeting is the deadline to finalise the written statements which will be approved by chair.
- The funding decision is made shortly after by the Swedish EPA's Director General.

5. Conflict of interest and competence

Prior to the review work for both pre-proposal and full proposal you should indicate conflict of interest and your competence. You will find all applications allocated to your panel listed on the Prisma website under the tab "REVIEW". Choose "call X" and click on "Review tasks". All panel members and chair should indicate any conflicts of interest. 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. All participants are not listed in the abstract, thus

reviewers should open the full application and read the budget section to see all participants and the CV section to find their affiliations.

You also need to indicate your competence to review the application (3 = high competence; 2 = medium competence; 1 = low competence).

When you have reported conflict of interest and competence for all applications click on Submit. Deadline: Seven days after each call closure (for later recruitments asap).

5.1. Principles for conflict of interest

In case of having a conflict of interest for a certain pre-proposal (Stage 1), you cannot evaluate it or be present when the proposal is discussed. In case of conflict of interest for a certain full proposal (Stage 2), you cannot participate in the review panel where only a few proposals are to be evaluated.

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, but the external reviewer will often not participate in the panel meeting. The principles for conflicts of interest also apply to external reviewers.

6. Remuneration

In order to proceed to 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 from the Swedish EPA and SwAM do not get remunerated.
- Accept remuneration – Fill in or update payment information if you want to accept remuneration. The remuneration will be paid to your bank account. The process of payment may unfortunately 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 be automatically 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. The review process

The Swedish EPA differentiates between scientific and relevance panel members in the evaluation panel. All applications will be reviewed by both scientific and relevance reviewers based on the Swedish EPA criteria.

Since the 2022 programme call is performed in two stages, panel members may participate reviewing in either both or one of the stages, please note that some parts of the instructions may only be relevant for one of the two stages.

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 review, and for conflict of interest. Directly 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.

Both scientific and relevance reviewers may have two types of review tasks: reviewer and rapporteur. A rapporteur is inherently also a reviewer on the applications. There will be two rapporteurs on each proposal, one for relevance and one for scientific quality, however only one of you will have the task to submit preliminary and final statements into the PRISMA system. Once the individual assessments are submitted by all reviewers, the rapporteurs will merge and summarise the other reviewers' assessments into a preliminary statement as a preparation for the panel meeting. The rapporteurs summarise the assessments at the panel meeting when the proposal is discussed. The final scores are decided on at the panel meeting.

8. Individual assessment and scoring

Click on the menu option Review tasks. All the applications you must assess 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. You can also view and download the review form in PDF-format.

In your individual assessments you should consider each proposal separately, the basis for the assessments should be the call text, and the main criteria for review, and in some cases the instructions for applicants may be taken into consideration.

Reviewers do not rank proposals during the individual assessment and applications should not be compared with one another. Ranking of proposals will be done during the panel meeting. To view additional information about an application you can either open the application by clicking Reg no. or by clicking Details. For all your assigned applications, you should:

Stage 1:

- Use the Excel evaluation template corresponding to your role: scientific or relevance available on the Bulletin Board in Prisma. You will have a special file for you, with your name on it.
- When you have completed your assessment, you upload your assessment to the Bulletin Board and you register your priorities in PRISMA (0 for reject, 1 for discuss, or 2 for accept).
- Please, send the research officer in charge an e-mail when ready.

Stage 2:

- Open the assessment form by clicking Write next to the application. Write can be found in the very end of the row.
- Use the evaluation form corresponding to your role: scientific or relevance. Choose only one role and one form. Our international experts should choose the scientific role and relevance reviewers from authorities should choose the relevance role.

- First develop your comments on each criterion. Give short informative comments on the strengths and/or weaknesses (in English). The comments are mandatory and aim to facilitate the discussion at the panel meeting and to help the rapporteur to compose the final statements. When developing your comments, you have a range of statements to consider (See Criteria to review).
- Then select scores accordingly (1-5) on each of the six evaluation criteria (See Scoring of proposals) corresponding to the explanatory comments (See Criteria to review).
- Set the overall score as your all-embracing judgement on the application, not a sum or average of the individual scores. In the review panel meeting, a joint score for scientific and relevance quality, respectively, for each proposal will be agreed upon by the panel.
- Click Submit when you have completed your assessment.

The scores and the comments in the assessment forms are the panel's working material and it is not public.

9. Criteria to review

The criteria to review are listed in the Excel-file (Stage 1) and under a separate tab in PRISMA – Scientific quality and Practical relevance (Stage 2). The criteria to review are not used directly when reviewing pre-proposals (Stage 1), however the criteria may support your prioritisation on whether a pre-proposal should continue to write a full proposal (Stage 2) or whether to be rejected. Moreover, criteria give advice on what is anticipated of a full proposal. For Stage 2, you are only obliged to score and comment within your role in the panel. Thus, please be observant that you score under the appropriate tab for your role (scientific or relevance).

You will review according to the [call text](#), which you will also find on the Bulletin Board and according to six criteria. The applicants write their applications according to the same six criteria. There are statements to consider within each of the six criteria you review, some apply better for Stage 1 and some for Stage 2. You may consider the statements for each criterion in your assessment, but they are not mandatory. Consider them a guide! Feel free to also consider issues beyond the statements.

9.1. Criteria and statements for review of scientific quality

Criterion 1. Aims and expected results

- The application has a solid, coherent, and transdisciplinary programme concept.
- Aims and objectives fit the call, both for the overall programme and the sub-projects.
- Research questions are appropriate, and hypotheses are relevant, both for the overall programme and the sub-projects.
- The research is well described and founded in relevant theory, and appropriate publications are referred to.
- The possibility of scientifically significant results exists.

Criterion 2. Methods

- The programme and the overall work plan are appropriate to the call.
- The sub-projects are well-defined, realistic, and suitable.
- The sub-projects interact well and support the overarching aims of the programme.
- The methods are clearly described, appropriate, and feasible.
- Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary methods are appropriate and lead to added value.

- Appropriate publications are referred to.

Criterion 3. Practical relevance

- Target groups, stakeholders, and end users are identified, and their needs are well described.
- Target groups, stakeholders, and end users will be involved in an appropriate way.
- The societal relevance is considered and relevant.
- The programme has the potential to contribute to sustainable development.

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 will be open and publicly available for authorities, society, and researchers.

Criterion 5. Management and budget

- Organisation and management are clearly described and suitable, and upholds the capacity and ability needed to perform the programme.
- The timetable is realistic and appropriate.
- The coordination of the programme is appropriate.
- The coordination and cooperation among sub-projects and participants are feasible and demonstrates added value.
- The total budget and the allocation of resources between sub-projects are reasonable and justified.

Criterion 6. Competence

- The programme coordinator has the appropriate competence and experience.
- The programme communicator has the appropriate competence and experience.
- The programme administrator has the appropriate competence and experience.
- The scientific competence of sub-project leaders is appropriate.
- The research group is coherent and well composed to deliver the anticipated results.
- The knowledge and skills required are appropriate and merits and publications are of high quality.
- The research group has useful national and international collaborators

Criteria 1-6. Overall assessment

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

9.2. Criteria and statements for review of practical relevance

Criterion 1. Aims and expected results

- The application has a solid, coherent, and co-creative programme concept.
- Aims and objectives fit the call, both for the overall programme and the sub-projects.
- The expected results have an impact on current management practices.

Criterion 2. Methods

- The programme and the overall work plan are well-defined and realistic.

- The sub-projects are well-defined, realistic and support the overall programme.
- 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 have been clearly described. The main target groups, stakeholders, and end users will be involved in an appropriate way.
- The results will 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.

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 will be open and publicly available for authorities, society, and researchers.

Criterion 5. Management and budget

- Organisation and management are clearly described and suitable, and upholds the capacity and ability needed to perform the programme.
- The coordination of the programme is appropriate.
- The coordination and cooperation among sub-projects and participants are feasible and demonstrates added value.
- The timetable is realistic and appropriate.
- The budget for activities coupled to the practical relevance is reasonable and justified.

Criterion 6. Competence

- The programme coordinator has the appropriate competence and experience.
- The programme communicator has the appropriate competence and experience.
- The programme administrator has the appropriate competence and 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.

10. Scoring of proposals

Stage 1 and 2:

Each criterion is scored 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.

Stage 1:

In the overall assessment of programmes/sub-projects and the priority settings of pre-proposals you briefly motivate how the context and logic between the criteria 1-6 leads to the priority of the pre-proposal. The priority scores are: 2 for Accept, 1 for Discuss and 0 for Reject.

Stage 2:

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

11. The review panel meetings

The review panel meetings are hosted by the Swedish EPA arranged either at the Swedish EPA in Stockholm or in a virtual communication tool. The purpose of the panel meetings is to discuss first the pre-proposals and later the full applications and determine the final ranking of the applications.

During the meeting scientific and relevance experts discuss the applications in order of registration number. For each application, the two rapporteurs introduce the programme. This summary, together with each of the priorities and comments serve as starting points for the discussion, in which all assigned both scientific and relevance reviewers participate. The purpose of the discussion in Stage 1 is to agree (in consensus) on an overall priority – reject, discuss, or grant, reflecting the general quality of the pre-proposal. The purpose of the discussion in Stage 2 is to agree (in consensus) on a new overall grade, reflecting the general quality of the application. When all applications have been discussed and received agreed new grades, they are ranked according to their overall grade. Only the top ranked two programme applications will be recommended for funding.

According to the Swedish EPA's governmental appropriation the funds should be distributed so that equality between women and men is considered.

12. Final written statements

Stage 1:

Written statements are prepared in the review of pre-proposals to let the applicants know which parts of the application that could be developed further in the full proposal. The comments should be short, polite and to the point. Rapporteurs will compile the statements for their set of applications assisted by the entire panel and agreed upon after the discussion at the panel meeting.

Stage 2:

Applications discussed individually at the panel meeting will receive a final statement that should reflect the final grade and the key points on each application. The comments should be short, polite and to the point. Rapporteurs will compile the final statements for their set of applications assisted by the entire panel and agreed upon after the

discussion at the panel meeting. The final written statements will be registered in PRISMA during the panel meeting, and it will comprise an overall score for scientific quality, an overall score for practical relevance, and a short written overall comment. The final statements will be communicated to the applicant once the formal decision is made.

An evaluation report is written including who has been in the review panel, the process, the final statements and the ranking. The final decision on financing will be made by the Swedish EPA Director General based on this report.

Finally, **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!