



## Guidelines

# Guidelines for gender equality in the research funding process

## Background and purpose

Section 2 Paragraph 12 of the Swedish Research Council's Instruction (2009:975) states that the Council shall integrate a gender equality perspective and promote gender equality in the allocation of research funding. The Swedish Research Council's policy for gender mainstreaming describes the Council's approach to gender equality at overarching level.

These guidelines supplement the policy, and clarify how gender equality shall be managed in the research funding process. The Swedish Research Council shall work to ensure the guidelines are complied with also in national and international collaborations that the Council participates in. The guidelines are aimed both at the scientific councils, councils and committees (ÄRK) and at the personnel working with the research funding process.

## Overarching goals

The guidelines shall ensure that the review of applications for research funding is gender-equal. The Swedish Research Council shall:

- achieve and maintain an equal gender distribution in its review panels
- ensure that women and men have the same success rates and receive the same average grant amounts, taking into account the nature of the research and the form of support
- be alert to and prevent unconscious bias and preconceived ideas based on gender in the allocation of research funding

## Gender equality in the research funding process

Gender-equal review requires that gender equality aspects are considered throughout the research funding process. This includes the planning stage, training and information to the Swedish Research Council's personnel and review panel members, the individual review work, the review panel meetings themselves, decisions and follow-up.



### **Preparation ahead of calls and reviews**

When planning new calls and focus areas, the board, scientific councils and committees (SÄRK) should consider gender equality aspects, for example by taking into account the proportion of women and men among the potential grant applicants. SÄRK should strive to ensure that the proportions of women and men among grant applicants correspond to the proportions of women and men among the potential grant applicants, and ensure that requirements set in conjunction with deciding on the grant form do not disfavour any category. Gender equality should also be considered in the design of the review, for example how assessment criteria are designed and/or weighted.

### **Appointment of review panels**

Review panels shall have an equal gender distribution. Equal gender distribution is considered to exist in a panel when each gender comprises no less than than 40% of the panel members.

Before review panels are appointed by ÄRK, the gender distribution shall be considered in terms of individual review panels, the review panels overall and, in particular, the review panel chairs. If the proposed composition of a review panel or proposed review panel chair falls outside of the 40–60% range, this must be specified in the supporting documentation. This documentation shall also include a justification for the deviation. Deviations shall, however, be avoided as far as possible, for example by taking into account the option to broaden the recruitment to include international members.

### **Assessment of applications**

Assessment of researcher merits is a criterion where there is a great risk of preconceived ideas having impact. ÄRK shall therefore take into account gender equality aspects in instructions for assessing merit, so that they do not disadvantage either gender. In the individual assessment of applications, as well as in discussions during review panel meetings, only “active research years” shall be considered when assessing the scope of scientific productivity. This means that time off for parental leave, leave due to own or a relative’s illness or similar circumstances (including those that may arise in a specific field/ÄRK) shall be discounted.

### **Training and information**

Before and during the review work, the review panels shall receive information about the guidelines for gender equality that apply, for example via peer review handbooks, and about how they shall be implemented practically in the ongoing review.

### **Sifting procedure**

If a sifting procedure for applications is carried out, the applications that are not sifted shall include both women and men to such an extent that there is a good



chance of achieving a gender-equal outcome in relation to the number of applications received. Any deviation from this principle should be justified.

### **Review panel meeting implementation**

To avoid focusing on gender affiliation, the gender and first name of applicants shall not be visible in the supporting documentation presented during the discussion of applications at the review panel meeting.

The Swedish Research Council's personnel and ÄRK's observers shall be alert to any skewness based on gender in discussions and shall introduce suitable measures.

The goal is to have the same success rates for women and men within an area. When applications of equivalent quality are compared during the prioritisation of applications within a review panel, the application that results in a more even outcome of the success rate shall therefore be prioritised. SÄRK shall give the review panel instructions for how equivalent quality shall be interpreted.

In cases where there are large differences in the number of applications from women and men respectively to the review panel (either gender constitutes 20% or less of the applicants to the review panel), prioritisation of individual applicants can have a major effect on the success rate. In these cases, an exception may be made from the goal of achieving the same success rate, on condition that the gender with fewer applicants to the review panel is not disfavoured. This can be done for the purpose of promoting gender equality in the area as a whole.

Before a review panel adopts its proposal for a decision to award funding (a priority list or similar), the success rate and, as applicable, the average grant amount shall be calculated for women and men respectively. Any differences shall be commented on by the review panel.

### **Decision to award funds**

The review panels' proposals for grant decisions from a gender equality perspective shall be presented to each ÄRK. Any disparities in success rates and average grant amounts between women and men shall be highlighted and justified. These presentations must be delivered before ÄRK make their decisions.

ÄRK's decision shall take into account the guidelines' overarching goal that women and men shall have the same success rates and receive the same average grant amounts, taking into account the nature of the research and the form of support.

### **Reporting and follow-up**

The Swedish Research Council shall follow up to what extent gender equality has been achieved in the allocation of research funding. The number of women and men who apply in relation to the proportion of those who can be deemed to be potentially applying researchers should also be reported. How gender equality is managed at review panel meetings and in the assessment of applications should be



followed up regularly, for example in the form of ‘gender equality observations’ carried out by the Swedish Research Council for analysis and evaluation purposes.

Each ÄRK’s annual presentation to the board of the outcome of the year’s calls shall include an assessment of the result from a gender equality perspective. This shall also include an analysis of causes and any measures introduced if the outcome is not satisfactory from a gender equality perspective.

### **Validity period**

The decision on guidelines for gender equality in the review of applications is valid as from 19 February 2024 until further notice. The guidelines shall be revised as necessary.