



Call: Strategic research grants 2024, Review Panel B1

Purpose of the call

The call is open for all research areas within the Faculty of Medicine with the aim to strengthen the competitiveness of researchers to attract external grants. The funding may be used for salaries (doctoral students, postdocs or other employees), infrastructures or to cover project running costs. This is the eighth time that the Faculty of Medicine announces the call.

Researchers who already have obtained any kind of local funding or co-funding of 500.000 SEK or more are not eligible to apply. Researchers who have received a total funding (local and/or external) of 4 MSEK or more (*1 MSEK or more for scientifically young researchers*) are also not eligible to apply.

Guidelines to assess the applications

The applications are assessed essentially using the same criteria as the Swedish Research Council (VR) and according to the below:

- The scientific quality of the project (1-7)
- Novelty and originality (1-7)
- The research competence of the project leader (1-7)
- Feasibility (1-3)
- An overall assessment, reflecting the scientific quality of the application (1-7)

The scientific quality of the project (1-7)

Strengths and weaknesses of the project's question and methodology, including potential for future scientific activities.

- Will the project, if successful, significantly advance our understanding of the field?
- Is the research proposal relevant for medical and health research and the definition of the problems and proposed solutions clear, convincing and compelling?
- Does the study design, research questions and/or hypotheses, and theoretical framework meet the standards of highest scientific quality?
- Are the research questions and/or hypotheses clearly defined and based on the appropriate literature and/or preliminary data?
- Are potential problems and alternative strategies identified and presented?
- Does the program present preliminary data to support the research questions?
- Are there relevant scientific collaborations?
- Are methods, including data analysis and statistics, appropriate for the project and well described?
- Are the ethical considerations for the proposed project described and addressed properly?
- If a gender and diversity perspective is described as relevant to the research project, has the applicant considered gender and diversity in the description of the proposed work, for instance as part of preliminary data, the choice of samples or study population, or data analyses?

Novelty and originality (1-7)

Use and implementation of new and existing methods.

- Does the project extend or challenge current understanding, opinion or practice in its field?
- Is the project built on a unique combination of ideas, preliminary data, and different methodologies to create novel approaches to address the question at hand?
- Is there potential for creation of new knowledge, novel technologies, or new directions for research and advancement of the field?
- Will completion of the aims improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice?
- Does the researcher propose a line of research that has the potential to significantly advance current knowledge in the field or is he/she simply adding details to existing knowledge?

The merits of the applicant (1-7)

Scientific qualifications and merits in relation to the proposed project.

- Does the applicant have sufficient research experience, expertise, level of independence and scientific network for implementation of the proposed project?
- What is the quality of the publications compared to other applicants? Focus is on the most relevant and important publications and reports, with emphasis on quality rather than quantity.
- How does the applicant's academic qualifications and achievements relate to his or her career stage and active time for research?
- Does the applicant have a documented independent line of investigation?
- Does the publication record suggest a coherent line of investigation? Does the applicant report publications both as a first and as a senior author?
- Does the applicant have ongoing or planned national or international collaborations that strengthen the quality of the project?

A seven-grade scale is used to evaluate the criteria novelty and originality, the scientific quality of the project and the merits of the applicant.

7. Outstanding	Exceptionally strong application with negligible weaknesses
6. Excellent	Very strong application with negligible weaknesses
5. Very good to excellent	Very strong application with minor weaknesses
4. Very good	Strong application with minor weaknesses
3. Good	Some strengths, but also moderate weaknesses
2. Weak	A few strengths, but also at least one major weakness or several minor weaknesses
1. Poor	Very few strengths, and numerous major weaknesses

Feasibility (1-3)

Carry out an evaluation of the feasibility of the proposed project:

- Considering the project as a whole, including participating researchers, does the applicant or project group have sufficient competence for completion of the project?
- Is the project leader's level of activity within the project sufficient with regard to the proposed research plan?
- Is the workplan, including the budget and time frame, realistic for implementing the proposed project?
- Are the materials, methods (including statistics and/or power calculations), experimental models, and when appropriate, patient/study cohorts adequate and well adapted to the hypothesis or research question?

A three-grade scale is used:

- 1. Not feasible**
- 2. Partly feasible**
- 3. Feasible**

Overall grade (1-7)

Above subsidiary criteria will together form an overall grade that will reflect an overall assessment of the application. With respect to all grades, use the total scale, where 1 will reflect the lowest quality of the applications you have assessed, and a 7 will reflect the best. The overall grade is not the same as an average grade or a summary of the evaluations; instead, it shall reflect the scientific quality of the application as a whole.

Ranking

You shall also rank each specific application against all the other applications you have reviewed. The ranking is an important instrument when the 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.

Triage to screen out applications (sifting)

In order to have an opportunity to discuss all applications judged to have a reasonable chance of being awarded a grant, a sifting process will occur, excluding the applications that have the least chance of securing funding. A general rule is that around 60 % of the applications shall be discussed at the panel meeting, but the exact percentage may vary from call to call. The sifting shall be carried out with the gender distribution in mind, in order to ensure the process is not applied differentially for women and men.

Applications where the ranking or the grading differs considerably, despite having a low ranking, should be identified and discussed at the meeting.

The list of applications up for discussion shall be made available to all panel members ahead of the meeting. All panel members can always ask for an application to be brought up for discussion at the meeting, even if it has been proposed to be excluded.

If there are 25 applications or fewer, all panel members will read all applications. If there are more than 25 applications and thus not all panel members have read all applications initially, it is important that all panel members read all applications that are to be discussed at the panel meeting.

Review panel meeting

At the review panel meeting, the applications are reported on and discussed, using the grading and ranking done by all the panel members ahead of the meeting. Each application is presented by the assigned rapporteur among the panel members. During the discussion, each panel member is free to change any grade, based on aspects raised that might have been foreseen by the individual reviewer. All grades from the different subsidiary criteria are then combined to produce a summary score for each application and a final ranking of the application in relation to the other applications. When two or more applications are assessed as equal, based on their total score, the score for scientific quality will be ranked as most important.

The chair leads the discussion, and as a rule, the rapporteur gives an introduction to the application in question. The chair is also responsible for including any assessments from any of the panel's reviewers in the discussion.

The review panel has equal responsibility for each application reviewed by the panel, and each one shall be evaluated based on its own merits. At the same time, applications shall compete 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 different scientific disciplines represented.

Note that the meeting time is finite. It is therefore important to try to find a balance in the time allocated to each application. If any possible conflict of interest are discovered (your own or others') during the meeting, please bring this up with the chair, preferably prior to the meeting.

A member from the Strategic Board for Research (FON) and/or a member from the Faculty Board (FN) at the Faculty of Medicine will be appointed as observers.

Prioritizing

Once all applications have been discussed, and the assessments are finalized for each application, the panel shall carry out a prioritization of the applications with focus on the overall highest scientific quality based on the summary score. This prioritization shall conclude with the review panel's proposal for applications to be awarded grants within the panel's framework. The panel shall also agree upon a priority list with two reserves.

The rapporteur writes a final statement

For the applications discussed at the meeting, the rapporteur for each application is responsible for writing a final statement. The rapporteur should write the statement with the aim of helping the applicant to improve their application. It is vital that this final statement reflects the joint opinion of all panel members, and the written comments should correspond to the assigned grades describing strengths and weaknesses of the application.

General advice and recommendations on final statements

- **Focus on describing both the main strengths and weaknesses of the application.** Try to emphasize relevant conceptual, structural and/or methodological issues as discussed at the review panel meeting.
- **Ensure that the written comments correspond to the assigned 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.
- **Consider the guiding questions** for the different criteria when you formulate the final statement.
- **Write concisely but not too brief.** The content rather than the length of the text is of significance. However, too brief justifications may be counterproductive, as the aim is to help the applicant understand the grounds for the assessment.
- Comment on whether divergence from the general instructions for the application has been weighed into the assessment of the application.
- Be constructive and objective.
- The final statement should preferably be written in English.

Do not

- Do not include a long summary about the applicant 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.

The Faculty of Medicine, Umeå University, wishes to express its sincere gratitude for the important work carried out by the review panel members.