

*Agria & Svenska Kennelklubben*  
**FORSKNINGS**  
 **FOND**

## Handbook for reviewers

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR REVIEWERS**

1. Research areas
2. Ethical guidelines
3. Summary of workflow
4. Reviewers
5. Fund website
6. Responsibilities
7. Conflicts of interest
8. Ethics
9. Assessment of applications
10. Award meetings
11. Quorum and attendance
12. Decision basis
13. Final reports

## Introduction

This handbook is designed for members of the Research Committee (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) who review and assess the applications received by the Research Fund (hereinafter referred to as the Fund).

The common purpose of the Fund is to promote high-quality scientific research relating to dogs, cats and other pets in those areas prioritised by the Fund.

The Fund is administered through the office of the Swedish Kennel Club (SKK). There is a joint steering group that manages the cooperation between Agria and SKK and this is the Fund's governing body, which also has responsibility for the Fund's organisation and general matters. The Committee is appointed by the Steering Group and is responsible for assessing the applications received.

The members of the Committee have been chosen on the basis of scientific competence and anchoring within the Fund's prioritised research areas.

The Committee holds two ordinary meetings per year, one in the spring after the Stage 1 applications have been prepared for assessment and one in the autumn once the Stage 2 applications have been prepared for assessment. At the spring meeting, the Committee decides which projects proceed to Stage 2. At the autumn meeting, the Committee submits proposals to the Fund's steering group for which projects should be granted funding. The final decisions are then made by the CEO of Agria and SKK respectively.

### 1. Research areas

The Fund finances research into veterinary medicine, genetics and ethology, as well as research into the importance of pets for humans and society.

#### ***The Fund prioritises the following research areas:***

- The physical and mental health, performance and welfare of companion animals
- The reproduction and rearing of companion animals
- The role of companion animals for humans and society

The Fund is also interested in systematic surveys and meta-analyses in order to collate the literature available in the above research areas.

Of the funding in the call for proposals, 60 per cent is allocated to research into veterinary medicine, genetics and ethology, while 40 per cent is allocated to the role of companion animals for humans and society.

*See also Research and Development Programme for Agria and the Swedish Kennel Club Research Fund for Companion Animals 2020–2023.*

## 2. Ethical guidelines

Through the research projects, the Fund works to enhance animal health and improve animal husbandry, but also to create peace of mind for animals and their owners in the long term.

In the case of research relating to the mental, social or economic importance of companion animals for humans and society, the link to providing many animals of the same species with a healthier and more sustainable life does not need to be as strong.

The Fund only finances research projects that benefit the animal species concerned and which aim to provide many animals of the same species with a healthier and more sustainable life. The animals must never be subjected to suffering and no animals may be subjected to unnecessary or painful animal testing.

For all studies that require a permit, this must be reported to the Fund before grant funding is paid. The research application must indicate whether the trial application has been, or will be, submitted.

The Research Committee strives for good ethics in its work and in its assessments of applications.

## 3. Summary of workflow

### **Stage 1**

- ***Application period – April***
- ***The Chair and secretary allocate the applications to the members of the Committee***
- ***The members read the applications and submit their proposed decisions in the application portal***
- ***At the award meeting in mid-June, the Committee decides which projects are to proceed to Stage 2***
- ***The applicants receive a decision***

### **Stage 2**

- ***Application period – September***
- ***The Chair and secretary allocate the applications to the members of the Committee***
- ***The members read the applications and submit their proposed decisions for new and ongoing projects in the application portal***
- ***At the award meeting in November, the Committee submits proposals to the Steering Group for which projects should be granted funding***
- ***The final decisions are made by the CEO of Agria and SKK respectively***
- ***The applicants receive a decision***
- ***Contracts are signed with those who have been granted funding***

The call for proposals takes place in two stages and in Stage 1 the applicant submits a brief description of the proposed project, focusing on the project's relevance and benefit for the pet sector. The application must state any use of laboratory animals, patient animals, private animals or human subjects. Those Stage 1 applications that are approved by the Committee proceed to Stage 2. The applicant must then submit a full-scale application that is evaluated on the basis of its relevance and scientific quality.

Applications can be made for funding periods of 1, 2 or 3 years. An application can be made for a maximum of SEK one million per year including overhead costs (OH), which may amount to no more than 25% of the sum for which the application is made.

Funding applications can be made by researchers in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Germany. The main applicant must hold a doctorate or have equivalent scientific experience and be affiliated with a university, research institution or other organisation such as an animal hospital. The Fund welcomes collaboration between research institutions in different countries.

Before a funding application for new projects can be made, previous projects must be reported according to the current timetable.

#### **4. Reviewers**

The members of the Committee shall:

- read and assess research applications in Stage 1 and Stage 2,
- submit a written opinion containing a proposed decision for their allocated projects,
- act as rapporteur at the spring and autumn award meetings,
- review and assess the annual reports received.

The rapporteur member remains attached to a project for its duration and is also responsible for assessing the annual reports of the projects. However, all members shall read all applications and be involved in the decisions taken. The Chair may need to reallocate applications where necessary.

#### **5. Fund website**

The research secretary publishes all applications on the Fund website. Current applications can be viewed by clicking on ***For researchers***, then ***Apply direct***, ***Reviewer*** and ***View my applications***.

#### **6. Responsibilities**

- All research applications are to be treated as confidential.
- Reviewers have a responsibility to the group, which means that what is discussed in the group must not be disclosed to anyone outside the group.
- Research applications must be reviewed by the members themselves.

- The decisions taken in the group are the joint decisions of all the members. A member is nevertheless entitled to have their reservations against decisions recorded at the meeting.
- Individual members have a responsibility to report their own conflicts of interest.
- Information may be provided to external stakeholders and the media only by the chair of the steering group, the research secretary or by a person appointed by the steering group.
- If an individual member is asked about whether an application has been granted funding, the member should refer the question to the Research Secretary.

## **7. Conflicts of interest**

A member is disqualified if they are involved in the application or have a close personal or professional relationship with the applicant, i.e. belong to the same research group, institution, department, institute or company. In the case of combined large institutions that have different areas of focus, the question of conflict of interest may arise at departmental level.

If a member has been allocated a project application where there is a conflict of interest, this must be reported to the Chair of the Committee to enable a new rapporteur to be appointed. When handling a project application where one of the members has a conflict of interest as described above, such member must leave the meeting room when the project in question is discussed and decided upon.

If a member realises during their assessment work that they are disqualified, this is noted in the assessment system and reported to the research secretary. The same applies if an assessor has been appointed to be the rapporteur and turns out to be disqualified. If a conflict of interest is discovered while a meeting is sitting, this must be reported without delay.

The Chair of the Committee may decide to derogate from these principles under special circumstances.

## **8. Assessment of applications**

The basis of the assessment is the scientific quality and relevance of the application for the pet sector, as well as whether the proposed projects align with the Research Fund's research and development programmes and prioritised areas.

Each principal reviewer must write a short assessment of their allocated projects in the application portal and score the projects.

In Stage 1, projects are given an overall grade as follows:

Grade 3: Good, should proceed

Grade 2: Needs improvement/clarification before proceeding

Grade 1: Not approved

In Stage 2, the following elements of the projects are scored on a scale of 1–6.

***Research question***

Is the focus area of the application well described?

Is the literature properly reviewed?

Are the question, hypotheses and aims clearly formulated?

Have preliminary studies with provisional results been carried out and have these been taken into account when formulating the research question?

Applicants must indicate in their application whether they wish to use data from Agria Djurförsäkring.

***Materials and methods***

Are the materials and methods well chosen with regard to the research question?

Does the structure enable reasonable statistical treatment so that the questions asked can be answered?

***Competence***

Is the competence of the applicants and co-applicants well described?

Do the applicants and co-applicants have sufficient qualifications to implement the project?

Does the main applicant have sufficient experience in project management?

Have the applicants published work in the field or in related fields?

Is the research intended to be conducted in an environment where the research group can receive competent support from their surroundings?

***Cost calculation***

Are the costs clearly accounted?

Are the costs reasonable in relation to the implementation of the project?

Is the overhead surcharge no more than 25% of the amount applied for?

***Suitability***

Does the project align with the Fund's research and development programme and prioritised areas?

Is the project sustainable and ethically sound?

***Communication of results***

Is there a plan for reporting?

Is there a plan for scientific publication?

Applicants must state in their application whether any grants applied for or awarded may come from insurance companies other than Agria Djurförsäkring.

Points score in Stage 2

6 points: Excellent

5 points: Very good  
4 points: Good  
3 points: Satisfactory  
2 points: Needs improvement  
1 point: Not approved

## **9. Award meetings**

The Committee holds two ordinary award meetings per year. The first award meeting is held in the spring after the Stage 1 applications have been prepared for assessment and the second is held in the autumn once the Stage 2 applications have been prepared for assessment. Members shall provide assessments of their allocated projects well in advance of each award meeting. The meetings are led by the Chair of the Committee.

The secretary of the Committee prepares the meetings and issues notice convening the meeting to all members well in advance. The secretary also distributes a summary of the members' assessments.

At the award meetings, each rapporteur member presents their allocated applications.

At the spring award meeting, the Committee decides which projects are offered the opportunity to proceed to Stage 2 and which projects are rejected.

At the autumn award meeting, the member who was the principal reviewer for the Stage

1 application is also the rapporteur for the application in Stage 2. Once everybody has had the opportunity to express their views, the group makes a proposal to the Fund's Steering Group concerning which applications should be awarded research grants. The final decisions are then made by the CEO of Agria and the Swedish Kennel Club respectively.

Written minutes shall be taken by the research secretary and checked and adjusted by the Chair of the Committee and the Chair of the Steering Group.

## **10. Quorum and attendance**

The Research Committee is quorate when more than half of its members are present. Members who are disqualified pursuant to section 7 shall be deemed not to be present. Decisions are made by simple majority. In the event of a tied vote, the Chair shall have the casting vote. The Chair should endeavour to prepare a case in such a way as to achieve consensus. If a member disagrees with a decision, they may express a reservation against it by recording a dissenting opinion. A decision may be taken only if all members have been given the opportunity to participate in the handling of the case and if satisfactory evidence has been submitted.

The Chair, in consultation with the research secretary, shall decide whether a meeting should be cancelled in the event of low attendance.

## **11. Decision basis**

In Stage 2, the reviewers shall submit a decision basis to the Fund's steering group. The project's rapporteur formulates a justification based on the conclusions of the Committee's assessment. The research secretary enters the decision and the decision justification in the application system and notifies all applicants once their decisions are available. The justification shall take into account the comments made at the preparatory meeting as well as the Committee's assessment criteria. Justification of rejection shall be formulated in such a way that the applicant clearly understands the reason for the rejection.

## **12. Final reports**

A financial final report and a scientific final report shall be submitted no later than 6 months and 12 months respectively after completion of the project. The Chair of the Committee shall read and approve these reports. The final reports are published in a project bank on the Fund's website and used as a basis for disseminating the results throughout the industry.

***The results of the activities carried out within the framework of the agreement between the principal researcher and the Fund will be made public through so-called Open access.***

The research secretary and Chair of the Committee handle all contact with researchers who apply for research funding and researchers who have been granted funding by the Fund.

30/03/2023