



Lantmännen  
Lantbruk



What the reviewers react to

Michael Murphy, Lantmännen

# Before the Review process starts

- Meetings in May
- Formas presents changes in the calls and the procedures
- Workshops concerning the judgment process
  - Different cultures can affect impressions
    - e.g. publications
  - Different specialties and expert areas
  - Consensus regarding which aspects differentiate a good application from a top notch application
- Necessary to assure as uniform scoring as possible
- Surprisingly good agreement about scores from diverse competencies and backgrounds



# First Impressions

- In June all members of the review board must declare their competency to judge each individual application as well as conflicts of interest.
- In practice the applications must be read
  - But as each reviewer will only score between 30 and 40 applications all the applications are not studied in detail
  - The summary is read, and only if needed, more of the application.
- When studying assigned applications in detail the reviewer will be influenced by the impression from the first reading of the summary
- Get the WOW factor in here!



# Evaluation Criteria

- Criteria for Scientific Quality
  - Research Question
  - Methods
  - Competence
- Criteria for Societal Value
  - Societal value of the research project
  - Communication with stakeholders/end users.



Lantmännen

# Scoring (not seen by applicants)

- All 5 groups get a possible score between 1 and 7
  - 4 is **Good**: criteria addressed well, improvements are possible.
  - 7 is **Outstanding**: application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are insignificant.
- To be considered for further discussion at the Panel Meeting in Sept. applications must make the cutoff, which is based on the total score.
  - At the panel meeting all applications are equal
- For total score Communications is as important as Scientific Quality.
  - Many applications score only 3 or 4 for Communications and Social Relevance.
  - Even when appropriate, reference groups, key stakeholders, interaction with industry, etc. are often missing.
  - If project is very basic research this must be declared and explained.
    - Maybe authorities?



# Scientific Quality

## ☐ Research question

- Innovative projects of high scientific quality get the highest scores
  - Experts in the area will recognize innovative approaches to pertinent questions. But some reviewers will not have that expert insight
  - **Be clear on what is innovative and what is important**
  - Avoid grand definite statements (unless they are true)
- Good research projects with a good hypothesis and a sound background will also score high
  - Hypothesis driven projects are easier to evaluate. Evidence driven research projects need more explanation.
- Clearly communicate the goals for the project.



# Scientific Quality

## ☐ Methods

- Plus if these also are innovative or are an innovative use of existing methods
- Presentation of methods must be thorough but standard methods do not have to be explained in detail.
- Statistics should be explained
  - Power calculations give extra weight
- Chosen models should be motivated



# Scientific Quality

## ☐ Competence

- Large variation in scores among reviewers
- Publications relevant to the research project
  - At least some in high ranking journals
- Either the main applicant, co-applicants or members in the group must be perceived as experts in the research area.
- In a complex project with several work packages: Who does what?
  - Experience as project leader is good
- A excellent indication of competence are results from pilot-studies.
- **The reviewers should get the feeling that this project will be successful.**





# Societal Value

- Social Relevance
  - Probably the toughest criteria to evaluate for the reviewers
  - Research should address important issues, either social or sectorial
    - This is not always apparent to foreign reviewers and /or non-experts of the sector
  - Viewpoints from stakeholders and end users should have been included in the design of the project.
  - Research needed for compliance with directives is important
- Communication
  - If the project is basic research with no clear end users then this must be stated. We don't read between the lines.
    - Indirect this requires a good background description.
  - Stating “2 peer-reviewed papers” in unspecified journals will get you a 3, possibly a 4 (if basic research), maybe a 2.
  - Communication activities should be ongoing during the whole project, not just at the end.
    - This can include reference groups, stakeholders, end users, authorities, etc.



# Ethical Considerations

- Human and animal research trials require approval from an ethical review board.
- Best if this approval has already been issued at the time of application submission
- If not already obtained it must be obtained as soon as possible
  - This process needs to be documented in the application
- For human studies involving infants and small children the research methods and models chosen are scrutinized deeply.
  - Motivation in the application is necessary



# WOW factors

- Innovative questions
- Intriguing, concise and accurate background material
- State-of-the-art methods
- Extensive communication plans using modern techniques
- The feeling that the goals of the project will be achieved.



# Thank You

