

Annual report 2020 - Svalbard Science Forum

2020 in short

- Development of the new Research in Svalbard Portal
- Corona call in summer
- In 2020 SSF had two Forum meetings, both were held digital
- By the end of 2020 there were approximately 3 940 projects; 13 000 publications; and 575 datasets registered in RiS.
- The Arctic Field Grant allocated funding to XX fieldworks
- Svalbard Strategic Grant was postponed to early 2021 to better correspond to the Svalbard Science Conference with opportunity to apply for back-to back meetings
- The SSF secretariat participated in and gave presentations at several digital conferences and workshops.
- The secretariat also visited Ny-Ålesund to have meetings and a workshop on the new Research in Svalbard portal

Overview of finances and funded projects

The available budget in 2020 for Svalbard Science Forum was NOK 13,4 million. This included the Research & Development budget for 2020 and transfer of funds from 2019.

The research activity in Svalbard has been heavily affected by the Covid-19 situation and many research projects have been set on hold or have limited activity. To support new and strengthen existing research projects in Svalbard in this challenging situation, the RCN offered a one-time grant for fieldwork. The extra call that was announced during the summer gave funding to 16 projects, most of them conducted in the Ny-Ålesund area. A lot of positive feedback is received for this initiative.

In 2020 58 Arctic Field Grant projects were funded.

The secretariat staff in Longyearbyen consisted of 3 research advisers in 2020.

The sources for Svalbard Science Forum's budget were the following:

- the Ministry of Education and Research (NOK 7 million)
- contribution to Arctic Field Grant (AFG) from the Ministry of Climate and Environment channelled via the Norwegian Polar Institute (NOK 522 000)
- contributions to the maintenance and running of the Research in Svalbard portal from Kings Bay AS (NOK 94 217), the Governor of Svalbard (NOK 62 811) and the Norwegian Polar Institute (NOK 117 771)

The expenditure on the Research & Development budget in 2020 was NOK 5,2 million. This budget includes SSF funding schemes Svalbard Strategic Grant (SSG) and Arctic Field Grant (AFG), and

development costs for the Research in Svalbard portal. Salaries and operational costs for the SSF secretariat and the Forum are not included in this budget.

Development costs for the new Research in Svalbard portal is financed by the central RCN budget. In 2020 NOK 6,8 million were spent on development costs for the new Research in Svalbard portal. Operational costs for the secretariat are also allocated in the central budget and in 2020 NOK 1,5 million were spent on operational costs for the SSF secretariat.

Planning the 2021 Svalbard Science Conference

The planning for the SSC2021 started in the fall of 2021 with the formation of the Scientific committee consisting of 11 members from research institutes and organisations. The theme for the 2021 conference will be cooperation. The conference is scheduled to take place in Oslo 2-3rd of November 2021.

Research in Svalbard portal (RiS)

The Research in Svalbard (RiS) Portal remains an important service offered by SSF. The open access portal provides a valuable catalogue of scientific activities in and around Svalbard. All ongoing and planned research and monitoring projects in Svalbard and surrounding waters are requested to and/or encouraged to register in RiS. The map function in RiS provides an overview of the extensive research activity in Svalbard, both past, present and planned.

The RiS Portal is an important tool to increase coordination, cooperation and data sharing within Svalbard research, but the full potential is as of now not fully exploited.

There are challenges regarding the technical development of the database, as well as the limited possibilities of extracting reports, since RiS is now quite old as a database. In 2020 the process was started to replace it and there was held a mini competition between The Research Council's existing IT developing companies to deliver a proposal for a completely new RiS (RiS 3.0). Ciber Experis won this competition, and during the summer Ciber had interviews with SSF staff and the RiS partners Kings Bay, the Norwegian Polar Institute and The Governor of Svalbard. During the fall Ciber organized workshops with the RiS partners and with NySMAC. Before Christmas there was agreement in the steering committee for the RiS 3.0 project to implement an integration between RiS 3.0 and Protel, which is Kings Bay's booking program, to lighten the load on their reception. By end of 2020, parts of the search module and project module was ready, and the sprint test-team could start their work.

Funding activities

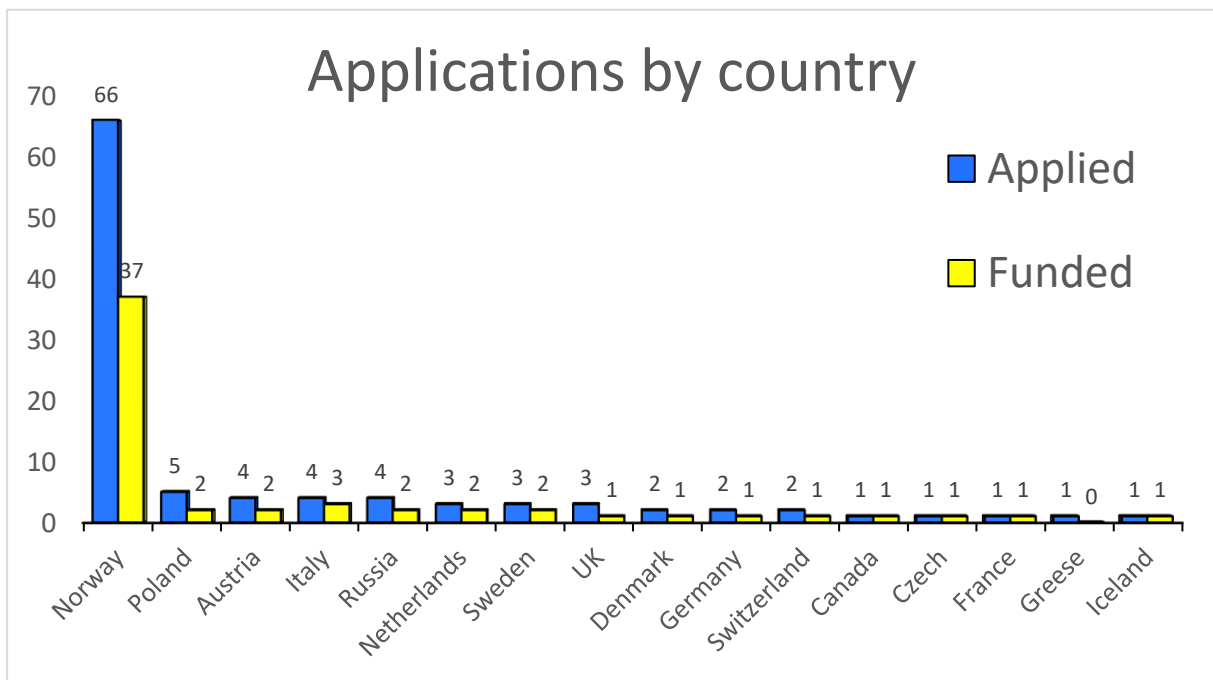
Arctic Field Grant (AFG)

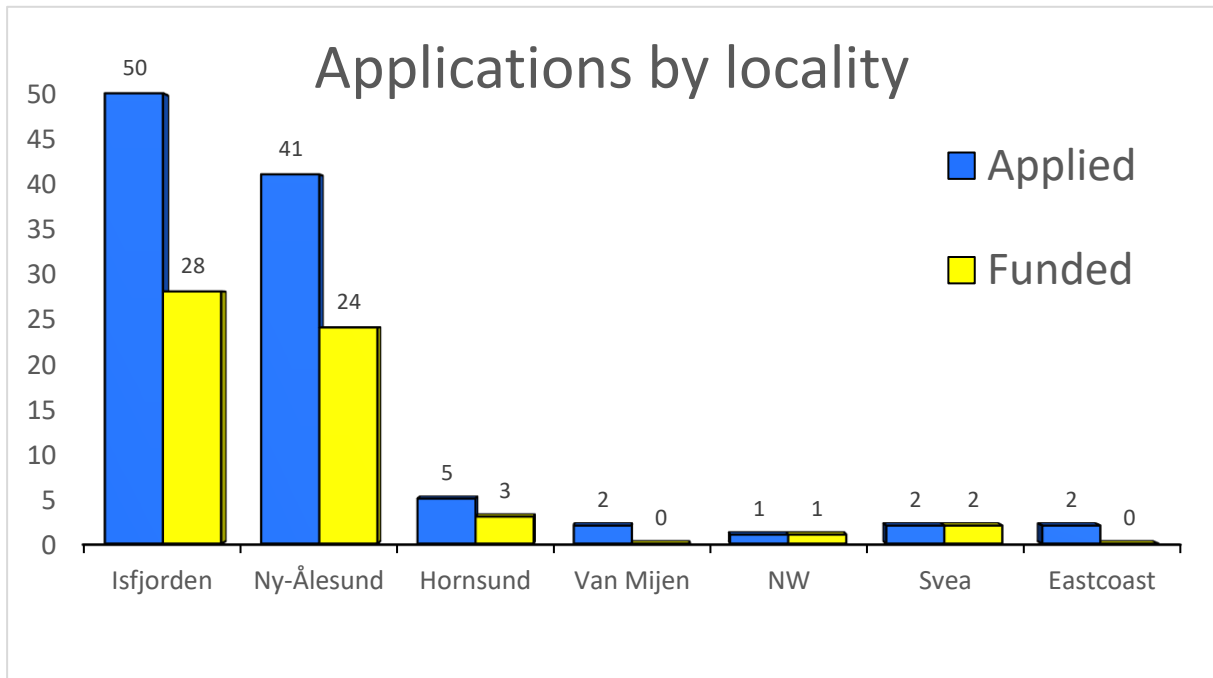
The Arctic Field Grant supports fieldwork for students and researchers collecting data in Svalbard and Jan Mayen. The grant only covers supplementary costs for fieldwork in Svalbard and is not intended to provide full financing of projects. The grant is intended for students in master's and doctoral programs and researchers who are studying at, employed at, or are collaborating with a Norwegian institution.

The available funding was, as in previous years, NOK 3,0 million. We were able to allocate unused funds from AFG and SSG and raise the available funding with 25%. For the Arctic Field Grant 2021

there were 103 applications for a total of NOK 7,19 million. NOK 3,74 million was allocated to 58 projects.

The number of AFG applications from Norwegian institutions were slightly higher comparable to the average from the past 6 years. About 1/3 of the projects funded in 2020 have been postponed to 2021 due to the Covid situation.





Extra call due to COVID-19

The research activity in Svalbard has been heavily affected by the Covid-19 situation and travel restrictions. Research projects have been set on hold or have had limited activity. The objective of this call was to stimulate to fieldwork activity in this challenging period. The grant covered direct expenses as flights, logistics, accommodation, equipment in connection with field-based activities, but also extra costs caused by COVID-19.

The call opened in the early summer and gave funding to 17 projects out of 20 applications received. Projects based in Ny-Ålesund, utilizing the unique research infrastructure there, along with projects involving master, PhD students or early career researchers were prioritized. The call contributed to the use of Kings Bay's research infrastructure which was warmly welcomed in a period of almost none research activity in Ny-Ålesund.

Communication and advisory activities

To carry out its mandate it is crucial for the SSF to be visible. The secretariat has a communication plan for 2018-2020. There is also a separate plan for the use of social media with Facebook as the main channel, and a communication plan for the Svalbard Science Conference. The activity has in general been a little lower in 2020, because of COVID-19, since the researchers have not been able to come to Svalbard. Still the SSF team established a Facebook group for researchers that could not travel to Svalbard that were in need of support from local teams to avoid losing their data, instruments etc. SSF has a steady growth of followers and by the end of 2020 the Facebook page has 2 300 followers. Not surprisingly, posts about funding opportunities (calls for AFG and SSG from SSF and calls from the RCN Polar Research Program POLARPROG) have gained most attention.

The SSF secretariat gave presentations in various settings, workshops and meetings in 2020.

- SIOS Polar Night Week, January
- NERC Arctic Research Station Open Day, February
- Ny-Ålesund visit with presentation of SSF, workshop for the new RiS, November
- NySMAC meeting, April and November

SSF posted four news articles and announcements on the SSF web site (www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-ssf) in 2020.