

Annual report 2021 - Svalbard Science Forum

2021 in short

- Development of the new Research in Svalbard Portal
- Svalbard Science Conference November 2021
- In 2021 SSF had two Forum meetings, the first was a digital meeting and the second was a hybrid meeting held in Ny-Ålesund
- By the end of 2021 there were approximately 5000 projects; 13 000 publications; and 600 datasets registered in RiS.
- The Arctic Field Grant allocated funding to 72 fieldworks in December for 2022.
- Svalbard Strategic Grant was an open-ended call in 2021 to better adjust to the uncertainties of the covid situation and to give opportunity to apply for back-to-back meetings to Svalbard Science Conference. 10 SSG projects were funded this year.
- The SSF administered an extra call for research stay and use of research infrastructure in Svalbard and Ny-Ålesund
- The SSF secretariat participated in and gave presentations at several digital conferences and workshops.

Overview of finances and funded projects

The available budget in 2021 for Svalbard Science Forum was NOK 15.7 million. This included the Research & Development budget for 2021 and transfer of funds from 2020.

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 help in this situation the RCN in 2021 had an extra call for research stay and use of research infrastructure in Svalbard and Ny-Ålesund. The SSF administered the call and funded 6 projects.

In December 2020 58 Arctic Field Grant projects were funded for fieldwork in 2021.

The secretariat staff in Longyearbyen consisted of 3 research advisers in 2021.

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 535 000)
- contributions to the maintenance and running of the Research in Svalbard portal RiS 2.0 from Kings Bay AS (NOK 77 554), the Governor of Svalbard (NOK 51 703) and the Norwegian Polar Institute (NOK 96 943)
- contribution to the development of the new Research in Svalbard Portal RiS 3.0 from Kings Bay AS (NOK 156 000), the Governor of Svalbard (NOK 104 000) and the Norwegian Polar Institute (NOK 195 000)

The expenditure on the Research & Development budget in 2021 was NOK 6.9 million. This budget includes SSF funding schemes Svalbard Strategic Grant (SSG) and Arctic Field Grant (AFG) and running costs for the Research in Svalbard portal RiS 2.0. 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 2021 NOK 18.7 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 2021 NOK 1.7 million were spent on operational costs for the SSF secretariat.

Svalbard Science Conference 2021

The planning for the SSC2021 started in the fall of 2020 with the formation of the Scientific committee consisting of 11 members from research institutes and organisations. The meetings of the Scientific committee continued through 2021 up to the conference that was held at Scandic Fornebu, Oslo 2nd-3rd of November. The secretariat now has good routines for the planning of the conference as this was the 3rd Svalbard Science Conference. The conference gathered 290 participants that were eager to meet in person after a long period where most meeting places have been digital. New this year was that the conference was live-streamed. Not all countries could participate in person due to covid restrictions and this was an opportunity for people that were not present to follow the conference. About 100 persons visited the stream. There were 9 side events to the conference, so there were meetings the whole week. Some side events were funded through SSG. A feedback questionnaire was sent out after the conference and the replies indicate that the participants were very satisfied with the conference. The conference ended up with a budget of NOK 960 000. NOK 550 000 was from the RCN while the rest was covered by the participant fee. The next Svalbard Science Conference is planned 31 Oct – 1 Nov 2023.

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 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.

In 2020 a project to reimplement RiS on new platform was initiated, the project being planned to terminate in May 2021. Insufficient progress and cost overruns led to a full rescaling and replanning exercise in March 2021: the development budget was substantially increased, and the project was planned to complete in December 2021. Important functionality, e.g., integration with booking systems, was taken out of the project. There were substantial changes in project staffing. The acceptance test in December indicated that there were too many bugs and launch of the new system was delayed until January 2022. The system is now in operation, but bug-fixing is still an issue. There is still a need for new functionality, e.g., better support for booking and IT-support for smooth implementations of new regulations concerning environment and field safety.

Funding activities

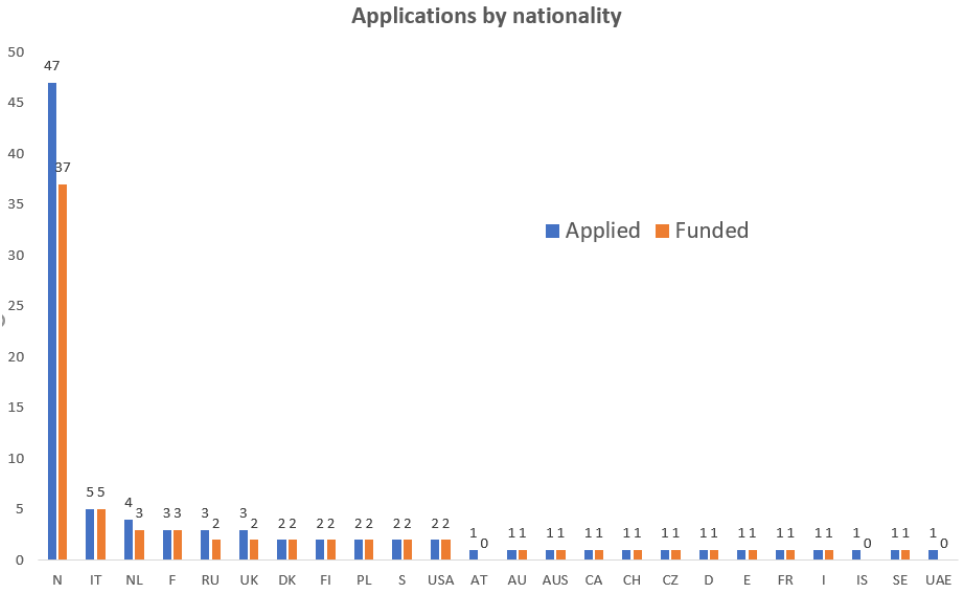
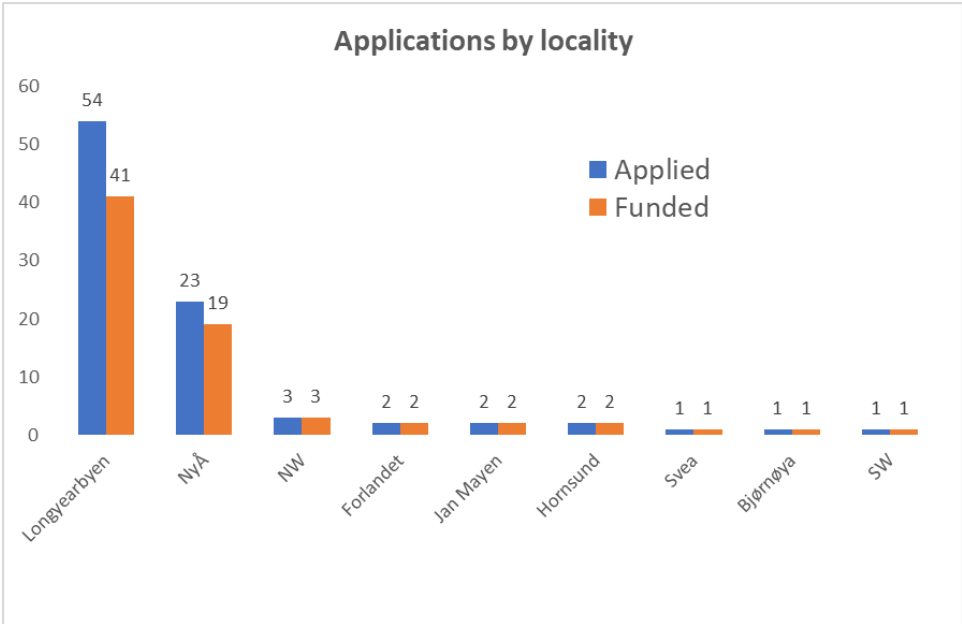
Arctic Field Grant (AFG)

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.

For the Arctic Field Grant 2021 there were 103 applications for a total of NOK 7.19 million. The available funding was, as in previous years, NOK 3.0 million. We were able to allocate unused funds from AFG projects and raise the funding so SSF could allocate NOK 3.74 million to 58 projects.

For AFG 2022 we received 89 applications and allocated NOK 4.99 million to 72 projects. We are pleased to see that there were successful applications to the new locations covered by AFG Bjørnøya and Jan Mayen. 81 % of the projects were funded.



Svalbard Strategic Grant (SSG)

Svalbard Strategic Grant funds workshops network and collaboration projects to researchers with relevance to Svalbard, to enhance coordination, collaboration and open sharing of data. Pilot studies and the planning of larger applications and/or projects can also be funded.

In 2021 SSG was an open-ended call to better adjust to the uncertainties of the covid situation and to give opportunity to apply for back-to back meetings in connection to the Svalbard Science Conference.

For SSG 2021 there were 12 applications for a total of NOK 4.7 million. SSF had NOK 3.5 million available for this call and allocated NOK 3.4 million to 10 projects.

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. Therefore, the Polar Research Programme in RCN had a call administered by SSF: "Support to research stay and use of research infrastructure in Svalbard and Ny-Ålesund". The objective of this call was to stimulate to research activity and use of research infrastructure in Svalbard in this challenging period.

The call was open-ended and was open May-November. The call gave funding to 6 of the 11 projects that applied. NOK 2,3 million were allocated. The call contributed to the use of Kings Bay's research infrastructure which was warmly welcomed in a difficult period of reduced research activity in Ny-Ålesund.

Communication and advisory activities

To carry out its mandate it is crucial for the SSF to be visible. The SSF has a communication plan for the use of social media with Facebook as the main channel, and a communication plan for Svalbard Science Conference. The activity has in general been a little lower in 2021, because of COVID-19, since many researchers have not been able to come to Svalbard. SSF has a steady growth of followers and by the end of 2021 the Facebook page has 2 400 followers. Not surprisingly, posts about funding opportunities (calls for AFG and SSG from SSF and calls from the RCN Polar Research Program POLARPROG, as well as Svalbard Science Conference) have gained most attention.

The SSF secretariat gave presentations in various settings, workshops and meetings in 2021.

- SIOS Polar Night Week, January
- NERC Arctic Research Station Open Day, February
- NySMAC meeting, April and November

SSF posted two news articles and announcements on the SSF web site (www.forskningsradet.no/prognett-ssf) in 2021.