

REGIONAL RESEARCH FUNDS IN NORWAY

In 2010 Norway established a new funding mechanism for regional research in addition to the national research funding system. A fund of EUR 0.8 billion was set aside for this purpose. An annual interest of about EUR 28.1 million is divided between seven research regions, each with its own independent research board.



Regionale forskningsfond



Region	Amount 2012 (1000 €)
Agder	1 832
Hovedstaden	3 775
Innlandet	2 064
Oslofjordfondet	4 530
Midt-Norge	3 342
Nord-Norge	4 274
Vestlandet	4 118
SUM	23 935

In addition 4.170 mill € is used to calls were two or more regions cooperate

Organisation

The regional funds were introduced as part of a political reform to transfer power from national to regional authorities. The main objectives of the funds are to

- strengthen research intended to increase and improve regional innovation and regional development
- increase R&D efforts in all Norwegian regions
- improve research quality and competitiveness of the R&D institutions in all regions
- organise arenas for the sharing of knowledge and experiences
- establish cooperation with national and international programmes and activities.

The research funds support R & D projects initiated by companies, public institutions, universities, colleges and research institutions.

Each region has established its own secretariat and board. The Research Council of Norway (RCN) has taken on the task of receiving and reviewing all applications, coordinate various issues on a national level, organise the learning arenas in cooperation with the regions themselves, and provide other services such as the infrastructure for regional webpages. This role as a service provider to regional secretariats and boards is unique compared to the other responsibilities of the Research Council.

Permanent evaluation process

A permanent evaluation process was established as part of the regional funding mechanism, the intention being that the regional research funds would benefit from having a team of evaluators following at least the first two years of their activities.

The main objectives of the permanent evaluation process were decided upon in close cooperation between the Research Council and the seven regions. An important goal is *"...to develop useful knowledge about the regional research funds as a funding instrument and secure the continuous improvement and development of it"*.

The reform was initiated and adopted by the red/green government currently governing Norway. At the time, quite a few people had strong misgivings, pointing to the danger of regional lock-in and low research quality. By providing well-founded advice at an early stage, the evaluation would make it possible to change course if necessary.

The first evaluation report was presented in January 2012. It showed that the new regional funds seem to be relatively well established after their two first years of existence, both at a regional and a national level. All seven regions have developed their own research strategies and have established competent secretariats. About 500 applications have been submitted annually. The new funding instrument seems to succeed in mobilising new players, especially from the industry.

Important impacts

In spite of the relatively small amount of money available the new funding scheme has already had positive impact. It is an incentive for the regions to develop their role as research policy makers and enable them to stimulate new research activities based on regional needs.

In about 44 per cent of applications to the regional funds in their first year of existence the designated project manager had never before applied for research funding from the Research Council. The quality of these applications was similar to those submitted by more experienced applicants.

A considerable number of companies seem to use the regional funding possibility as a starting point for their research-based innovation processes. All in all, about four out of ten applications were submitted by industry. The evaluation shows that even the projects established by universities and other research institutions have a relatively strong relevance for industrial development and normally involve companies or public institutions as active partners.

Table 1 Allocations in per cent of the total number of applications in 2010, by sector.

Sector	Per cent from the Sector	Number of applications	Granted (%)**	Part of total grants.*
Universities and university colleges	24.1	138	37.0	15.9
Research institutes	19.5	112	53.6	18.1
Industry	41.9	240	35.4	59.1
Organisations	1.9	11	9.1	0.1
Hospitals and other health institutions	4.9	28	14.3	2.0
Public bodies	7.7	44	27.3	4.8
Total	100.0	573	37.2	100.0