



Writing for Success!

Preparing winning fellowship applications

In this document we gather together some relevant information on the evaluation of proposals, feedback on positives and negative issues from those who review applications and finally some FAQs on the technical details of submitting an application.

Evaluation

Each application is sent to three expert reviewers for the relevant field of research. They assess the application by marking against a series of criteria, each with its own weighting:

1. Quality of Proposal (weight x 3)
2. Relevance to SCAR Science Groups including the Humanities and Social Sciences groups, and/or the current Scientific Research Programmes. (weight x 2)
3. Does the proposal help build capacity in a country that would most benefit? (weight x 2)
4. Is the study largely self contained (weight x 1)
5. Is the study feasible in the time estimated and will it likely lead to publication? (weight x 1)

The results of the assessments are collated and ranked and as many of the top ranked proposals are funded as resources allow.

Reviewer Feedback – Common issues

Capacity building:

“Applicants need to clearly explain what expertise is available at host but lacking at home and therefore how the proposal will build capacity.”

“Proposal reads more like a way of purchasing analyses rather than a transfer of expertise, doesn't meet the scheme goals as well as some other proposals.”

“Hard to say that home facility is lacking capacity and therefore needs to build it.”

“What is totally lacking is an explanation why this work has to be done at host, or what expertise the host brings that the home institute doesn't have (at first view, it seems as if all the necessary expertise is already available at home)”

Impact:

“Significance of data generated from proposal is not explained. “

“does not do a great job of explaining why data generated by proposal will be significant”

“Does not really make the case why the topic of proposal is of interest.”

“Could a lot of this work not be done via online searches?”

“Unclear how representative the proposed study region is really for other ice shelves.”

“Unclear where the final data will be stored (database) as a proposed main product.”

“Proposal appears to be integral to a PhD that actually exists and is funded already - the point of these Fellowships is not to fund a central part of an existing project.”

“The study itself is not very original.”

“Don't see exactly the originality of the proposed work compared to the relatively numerous recent publications.”

Antarctic Relevance:

“It is not clear why especially this study should contribute significantly to Antarctic research”

“A broader Antarctic-relevant context is poorly developed.”

“Not sure that the techniques proposed are appropriate for Antarctic context.”

“No reason that SCAR or COMNAP pays for the development of a tool which will be mainly used in the Arctic.”

Feasibility:

“SCAR/COMNAP funds can contribute to answer only a small part of the different ambitious questions.”

“The proposed work would take far longer than 6 months to complete.”

“Difficult to judge this proposal as there is no detail about candidate and whether they are qualified to carry out this work.”

“More like a post doc 3 year task than a 6 month fellowship.”

“Study aims high but does not provide evidence how this can be matched.”

“The proposal is often vague on exact methodology to bring the data together in analysis, also unclear how they will come to proposed products, high level paper seems unrealistic from missing clear work plan.”

“Proposal both lacks sufficient detail and sets out to do an awful lot of work.”

“Don't know if approach will provide results in time during the summer campaign.”

Budgeting:

“Budget justification is very sketchy.”

“It would have been useful if more details had been provided on the consulting fee.”

“All subsistence and living costs are paid, but, in my view, a consulting fee should not be paid on top of this.”

“The travel costs are not very well justified.”

Reviewer Feedback – Positive features

“Well-written proposal that explicitly addresses the requirements of the scheme.”

“The science is at the cutting edge and the rationale behind the collaboration is clear.”

“Researcher will clearly take significant new knowledge back to their home institute.”

“Host institute will be able to provide very good training.”

“There will clearly be considerable transfer of expertise and techniques from host to home institutes resulting from this project.”

“Highly feasible, methods straight-forward. Study is usefull as a baseline for more advanced and comparative studies. Special relevance for SCAR SRP AntEco.”

“The study builds on existing knowledge but is novel for the Antarctic. The experimental approach is complex and very ambitious. Relevant to SCAR SRP AnT-ERA.”

“A clearly presented proposal addressing an important topic in Antarctic climate studies.”

“Well defined study, top level science, will produce high-rank output, nicely combined observations and modeling.”

“Very clear proposal and aims, interdisciplinary between field observation and modeling.”

“Proposal is straightforward and achievable, and will generate original data.”

“Proven expertise to address topical and relevant questions.”

“Collaborative work between 3 countries which is one important factor to take into account in this fellowship.”

“Lead at Host Institute is well reknowned and I am confident that applicant will be well supervised.”

“The proposal clearly explains the research project (even for a non-specialist), provides good motivation for the proposed development.”

FAQs on technicalities of application

Q: My research area is to improve the efficiency of photovoltaic cells. Am I eligible to apply for a fellowship?

A: To apply for a Fellowship, your research *must* be in Antarctic or Southern Ocean science.

Q: Can the funding be retrospective? The project I'm participating in starts this month (before the deadline), but continues until August.

A: No, funding cannot be retrospective, it must be for a visit starting after the award is granted.

Q: What is the time frame of using the Fellowship funding? For instance, is the travel to a host institute to be completed within a certain time after the Fellowship approval, e.g. within a year?

A: Yes, the period of the Fellowship is one year, beginning in August, to be completed by July/August of the following year, and the visit must happen within this time. Only in exceptional circumstances are extensions allowed.

Q: Due to current commitments, I would not be able to start my Fellowship until January next year. Can I apply for a Fellowship for the full year, or would I be limited to completing it by July?

A: The Fellowship is awarded to cover the costs of a short-term visit (a few weeks or a couple of months) to a research group in another country. The visit may be undertaken at any time during the year of the Fellowship, to suit both parties. Fellowships are not intended to fund someone for the whole year. If the visit would be carried out in the first half of next year (up to the end of July), then you should apply for the current round. If your proposed visit would be in the second half of next year, then you should wait until next year's scheme to apply.

Q: Is it possible to include two or more overseas host institutes in my application?

A: You need to have one primary host who will sign your host agreement. You can then visit other places (including institutes in other countries), and have working partnerships with other organisations as your time, budget and project allows. You should include details about the other institute in your proposal and include any associated costs in your budget.

Q: Are there guidelines that should be followed for the subsistence amount in the host country?

A: There are no cost-of-living guidelines as this varies from country to country,

and between locations within a country. You will need to get cost-of-living advice from your host (or hosts, if you are visiting more than one institute).

Q: Can a host institute be visited several times?

A: Yes, a host institute can be visited several times but the amount of the award is limited to USD \$15,000. Multiple visits would increase the travel costs and therefore impact on the budget. In the Proposal, you would need to justify the reasons for making more than one visit to the host.

Q: I saw that some previous awards were given as joint SCAR/COMNAP fellowships. Is this a decision made by the selection committee, or should this be specified in the application?

A: The decision to award joint fellowships is made by the selection committee - you cannot select a joint fellowship yourself.

Q: Can I apply for the Prince Albert II of Monaco biodiversity fellowship?

A: No, you should make a standard fellowship application. The selection committee will choose the recipient of the biodiversity award from among the SCAR Fellowship applications.

Q: When will the decision about awards be made and candidates notified? How soon after that will the selected researchers be able to get funds and visit their host country? My proposed host needs these details in order to make a final decision.

A: After the closing date, the scientific review panel will assess all applications and make recommendations to the SCAR Executive Committee, to be confirmed around the end of July. Applicants will be notified of the result of their applications shortly after, in early to mid August. Funds can be available to successful fellows immediately and they can begin their visit to the host institute as soon as they like after that. The fellowship period is for one year so the research project, including the visit, should be completed by the end of July the following year.

Q: I have some questions about eligibility. I currently live in Canada and will graduate with my PhD this summer. From October, I plan to work in Chile for a period, including carrying out some Antarctic research. How would I explain the home and host institutes on the application?

A: Your home institute will be where you are working and living at the time of your application. Even though your current home is Canada, if you are working in Chile, your home institute will be in Chile. Therefore, you would not be able to visit another institute in Chile, nor use the SCAR Fellowship to help fund your ongoing work in Chile. You could, however, apply for a SCAR Fellowship to fund a short-term research trip to an institute in another country (the host institute)

but that must be different from both your country of origin (Canada) and current residence (Chile).

Q: Will a fellowship be helpful for getting any postdoc position at a related institute in the future?

A: Any fellowship (including a SCAR/COMNAP Fellowship) is good for your CV, though being awarded a Fellowship does not guarantee you a job at the Host Institute you have applied to, nor at any other institute.

Q: How many published research papers are needed to be applicable for these fellowships?

A: You do not need to have papers published already in order to apply.

Q: I will be staying the whole year at Maitri station, Antarctica. Will this affect my eligibility to apply for a fellowship?

A: No - your home country will be considered "India". You would need to visit another country, or another country's facilities in Antarctica, to apply for the Fellowship. Remember that, in the event you are awarded a Fellowship, you would need to start work within nine months of the award.

Q: For my research project, I need to perform oxygen isotope analysis (^{18}O) of sea water samples and ice cores and it is possible to do this at the laboratory of Helsinki University. It costs around 10 euro per sample if I do the analysis myself, and 15 euro per sample if I give my samples to laboratory staff. I will have approx. 60-70 samples.

A: Bench fees are a slightly complicated issue and depend on your particular circumstances. Here are the various scenarios according to the information you have provided:

1. If Helsinki University *is not* your host Institute, you can get the samples analysed either by other staff or yourself, and you can claim for the cost.
2. If Helsinki University *is* your host Institute, you *cannot* pay Helsinki University for analysing samples *yourself* and this cost *cannot* be included in the Fellowship budget.
3. If Helsinki University *is* your host Institute, you can get the samples analysed by *someone else* and this cost *can* be included in the Fellowship budget.

Q: Can the area of research include the sub-Antarctic islands?

A: Yes, but it must be relevant to Antarctic science. Specifically for a COMNAP Fellowship, it would be expected that the applicant would be hosted at the host institute, or in the Antarctic, but not on a sub-Antarctic island.

Q: Would you encourage students just finishing a PhD to apply directly for fellowships (whether SCAR or not), or do you think researchers benefit from a bit more experience in general through a conventional post-doc?

A: As a general matter, we would encourage you to apply to fellowships and other opportunities at all stages of your career.

Q: Please would you comment on the applicability of developing and testing an instrument for Antarctic science / engineering under the COMNAP scheme?

A: If the proposal is just about testing a piece of equipment, it probably would not be well appraised, but if it is of a practical nature in an engineering sense, relevant to Antarctic research, then it may well be highly relevant.

Q: Can I use the fellowship as part of my PhD?

A: Yes.

Q: Does the project have to contain a fieldwork component?

A: No.

Q: Is there a list of what countries would be considered "smaller or less well-developed Antarctic research programmes"? Obviously the USA and UK, etc. would not be on that list, but any others?

A: The differentiation is intended to highlight the role SCAR would like to play in helping build capacity in countries where the Antarctic research programme is limited to a few groups, and there are limited national Antarctic capacity-building opportunities.

Q: I would like to know what you think is essential to do in the host institute (lab analysis, etc)?

A: There is no list of requirements, the important issue is that it complements your research. This can be an additional approach not used previously.

Q: Can you apply for a fellowship to learn something completely new? In other words, is it enough to have some broad knowledge on what you want to learn and then use the fellowship to learn perhaps (for example) a new method?

A: As long as it is well-supported and explained in the application, it is perfectly possible.

Q: My idea for a project is based around model development. I am concerned that a lot of the collaboration with the host institute may look as if it could be

done by email. Work is greatly accelerated by face-to-face contact. Is this justifiable?

A: The benefits will be assessed based on the details of the application and all of the assessors are well aware of the benefits of face-to-face communication.

Q: Would it increase the chance of receiving a SCAR fellowship if the candidate is able to access additional funding?

A: It may be helpful but the overall quality of the application will be far more important.

Q: Can funding be used to support my participation in an existing project, or would that contradict the "self-contained" aspect?

A: Participating in an existing project is fine as long as there is a clear benefit to the applicant, above simply contributing to that project. So identifying the personal impact from the participation would be very important.

Q: Are there any issues with having worked with the host institution/academic before?

A: No, as long as you are doing something new that will add value.

Q: Does the host institution need to be an 'Antarctic institution' or can it be an institute with expertise in methods that you will then apply to Antarctic research?

A: There is no restriction on the institute being Antarctic specific - for example, it can be an Antarctic research group within a University, etc.

Q: For budgeting, can you provide a general example of how funds are used? e.g. 50% subsistence, 20% materials . . .

A: There is no set breakdown expected as there will be large differences between applications, but it is important to include clear justification for the costs specified in the budget.

Q: I am currently not in a PhD programme, but I'm collaborating in some research with programmes that I'm not officially engaged in. Am I eligible?

A: The relationship with the home institute needs to be clear. The evaluation of the element of capacity building within the application will depend to some extent on this relationship.

Q: Can you use the fellowship in part for collaborative work - for example, to hold a meeting or workshop at the host institute?

A: The Fellowship funds are specifically targeted at the applicants so, if funds were to be spent on a meeting or workshop, it would not be regarded as relevant to the programme.

Q: Can I apply for a fellowship to visit a PhD co-supervisor, in order to learn from them, and to work with them on a part of my PhD project?

A: Yes, but this should have a specific focus that is beyond the scope of normal PhD supervision.

Q: How do you assess if an application from the social sciences field is at the 'cutting edge of science'? Are there any specific topics of research that would be considered for eligibility, or not?

A: Applications from the social sciences will be assessed by experts within that field so there should not be any restriction on topics from those fields with regard to eligibility.