



Svalbard Science Forum annual report 2022

Approved in SSF 2023-2.

The Svalbard Science Forum (SSF) was established in 1998. SSF has a mandate from the Ministry of Education and Research. The mandate was last time revised in 2019. It is broad and ambitious and states that the overall objective of the SSF is to contribute to increased scientific quality in research in Svalbard. The Forum shall contribute to good coordination of, and offer accessible information about all research in Svalbard, and contribute to make Svalbard attractive to Norwegian and international researchers.

The mandate the composition of the Forum, its members are the major stakeholders in Svalbard research, i.e., the main institutions, locations, and bodies that facilitate research. **In 2022 there were eight members and one observer in the Forum.** It gives RCN the responsibility for the SSF (“RCN manages SSF and is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the secretariat”) with a secretariat in Longyearbyen and resources from the RCN main office in Oslo. This responsibility is executed by holding Forum meetings twice annually. The secretariat prepares the meetings and background documents for the items on the agenda. Typically, these are about the Research in Svalbard portal (RiS), the funding schemes, and about the framework for research in Svalbard such as regulations. Information exchange between the members of the Forum is always on the agenda.

The strategic tasks given in the mandate are ambitious and primarily concern coordination. The SSF shall, among other tasks, contribute to good coordination of all research in Svalbard, the sharing of research data, to increased coordination and cooperation regarding observations and time series and develop strategies and plans for the coordination. It is also stated in the mandate that SSF shall contribute to SIOS becoming an effective tool for the utilization of infrastructure in and around Svalbard.

Further, the mandate covers work concerning funding schemes, tasks associated with information and daily operation, and support to the Governor of Svalbard. The latter implies a role as an advisory body on all issues regarding research in Svalbard, and also to support the Governor with assessments of proposals to Svalbard's Environmental Protection Fund.

One of the tasks of SFF is to provide information and advice to the public authorities, and to be a discussion arena and a proponent for research interests in cases that concern scientific activity in the archipelago. These functions are implemented by, e.g., giving input to and providing replies to public consultations on plans and regulations that affect researchers and research activities in Svalbard. Replies to public consultations are, time permitting, discussed and agreed upon in a Forum meeting, and submitted as a Forum reply.



However, the meaning of coordination of research is not very clear. Pragmatically, we work with coordination in several ways: the collaboration that is enabled through the RiS portal, the funding schemes, and the Forum meetings are all well-established coordination mechanisms that also reduce the environmental impact and the carbon footprint of the research activities in Svalbard.

The resource situation in the secretariat after the 2022 downsizing of the RCN, and the restrictions that are put on research activities in the difficult balance between many interests in Svalbard, environmental protection being one of these, are other challenges to the SSF.

[Hvordan tas det videre?](#)

The members of the SSF are:

- The Research Council of Norway (chair)
- Kings Bay AS
- The Norwegian Polar Institute
- The University Centre in Longyearbyen - UNIS
- NySMAC - Ny-Ålesund Science Managers Committee
- The Polish Polar Station in Hornsund
- Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System - SIOS
- The Norwegian Meteorological Institute
- The Governor of Svalbard (observer)

The Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute of Roshydromet (AARI), Barentsburg) is “temporarily suspended” as a member of the SSF.

2022 in short

- There were two Forum meetings in 2022, the first in Tromsø and the second in Longyearbyen, both in a hybrid format.
- By the end of 2022 there were approximately 600 active projects; 13 400 publications; and more than 3 000 datasets registered in RiS.
- The SSF secretariat participated in and gave presentations at several digital conferences and workshops.
- The planning of the 2023 Svalbard Science Conference was discussed at both Forum meetings, and the secretariat started the preparations for the conference. The conference will take place 31 October - 1 November 2023 in Oslo.
- The secretariat visited Ny-Ålesund Research Station 25-28 April
- The Forum gave its response to the public consultation on the proposed Field Safety Regulation after invitation from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries.
- The Forum gave its response to the public consultation on proposed changes to the Svalbard Environmental Law and its regulations after invitation from the Norwegian Environment Agency



- The secretariat participated in several meetings on a possible protection proposal for Lower Adventdalen after invitation from the Governor of Svalbard.
- Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund: The secretariat provided advice and assistance to the Governor of Svalbard in connection with research-related applications.
- Through the Arctic Field Grant and the Svalbard Strategic Grant funds were allocated to 55 fieldworks and 14 workshops/projects respectively.

Forum meetings

There were two meetings in the Forum in 2022.

Tromsø, 31 March 2022

The first meeting was held in Tromsø the 31st of March at the end of the Arctic Science Summit Week. This made it convenient for many members of the forum to join the meeting in person, but there was still need for a hybrid format.

As a consequence of Russia's war against Ukraine the Research Council of Norway had decided, in line with official Norwegian policy, not to invite the Russian delegate to the meeting. The members of the forum were informed about this decision before the meeting. There was no agenda item on this issue, but there were no objections to the decision of the Research Council.

At the time of the meeting there were two important public consultations open on proposed regulations for Svalbard, with the 1st of May as deadline for comments. There was one proposal for changes to the Svalbard Environmental Law and its regulations (available in English) and another proposal for a new regulation of fieldwork safety (unfortunately only available in Norwegian). The potential impacts on research activities were the main topic for the discussions in the meeting. The secretariat had prepared draft opinions on the various items in the proposals, and the Forum had substantial discussions and comments to the items. In April the secretariat, based on the discussions in the meeting, prepared the final comments to the proposals and sent them to the appropriate public bodies.

The Forum discussed the experiences from the Svalbard Science Conference in 2021 and gave valuable input to the preparations for the conference in 2023 including suggestions for topics and for members of the scientific committee.

Longyearbyen 18-20 October

In this meeting there was time to visit the Kjell Henriksen Observatory and to gather for dinner. We also had a presentation of SvalBox, a collection of geological data of Svalbard organised for interactive and visual use of the data.

The topic of coordination of research was covered in a series of agenda items.



The Norwegian Polar Institute presented their experiences regarding coordination of research and ambitions for Ny-Ålesund Research Station: It took some time for NPI to find good means of communicating with international partners in Ny-Ålesund, but things are now functioning well. NPI pointed out that the four flagships are in a very good position to help with reduction of redundancy and good research coordination.

It is in the mandate of the forum that SSF shall coordinate research. However, the meaning of coordination of research is not very clear, neither are the mechanisms of coordination. The only actor with formal power is the Governor of Svalbard, and that power is not there to deal with how researchers cooperate and coordinate.

Hvordan
tas det
videre?

There are needs for coordination when it comes to field work, and there are scientific and economic benefits to be gained by sharing plans for fieldwork and helping each other with data, ensuring parallel or complementary observations (whatever is needed), calibration of instruments, logistics, safety, etc.

Moreover, the Governor is obliged to consider the accumulated footprint of research and other human activities. In 2023 the Governor will therefore introduce set application deadlines for permissions for fieldwork so that they can keep an eye on the accumulated load in given areas at given periods. In this way the Governor can push the researchers to coordinate so that they can get roughly the same research data with less footprint.

The forum had an initial discussion on the upcoming public consultation regarding protection of the Lower Adventdalen.

The forum discussed the Research in Svalbard portal and the Svalbard Science Conference 2023.

Overview of finances, personnel, etc.

The secretariat staff in Longyearbyen consisted of 3-4 research advisers for the majority of 2022.

The grants from Svalbard Science Forum (AFG and SSG) are funded by allocations from the Ministry of Education and Research (NOK 7 million) and the Ministry of Climate and Environment channelled via the Norwegian Polar Institute (NOK 546 000). There was also a small sum transferred from 2021.

The development project for the new version of the Research in Svalbard portal (RiS 3.0) was closed early in 2022. The cost for the last part of the development project in 2022 was 684 100 NOK. The development project was funded by the RCN with some minor contributions from the partners.

Running costs for RiS were:

- Operations and maintenance: 1 800 000 NOK plus VAT
- Further development 1 919 150 NOK plus VAT.



These expenses are covered by the project partners as follows:

- The Research Council of Norway, 60%
- The Norwegian Polar Institute, 15%
- Kings Bay AS, 15%
- The Governor of Svalbard, 10%

The Governor and Kings Bay AS are exempt from VAT, but NPI and RCN (with headquarters in mainland Norway) pay ordinary VAT.

Salaries and operational costs for the SSF-secretariat and the Forum are parts of the ordinary budget of the RCN.

The government's proposal for the state budget for 2023 included a major cut in the operational expenses for the Research Council of Norway. The reduced budget will have consequences from 2023 and onwards.

Impact of Corona: The research activities in Svalbard have been heavily affected by the Covid-19 situation, including travel restrictions. Research projects have been put on hold or slowed. During 2022, there were still some project delays, but research activities have increased and at the end of the year, the situation was almost normal.

Research in Svalbard portal

The new version of the portal, RiS 3.0, was planned to complete in December 2021 but was delayed until January 2022. The system that was delivered suffered from many bugs. While the supplier fixes the bugs, it is the job of the secretariat to identify and document bugs, and to test the system after bug fixing. This has required considerable efforts from the secretariat. During 2022 focus has been on error correction and on stabilizing the portal.

RiS performed well over the summer, and there was no downtime during this period. This is good news, and a good performance indicator.

During 2022 the secretariat has been working closely with The Norwegian Polar Institute, The Governor of Svalbard, and Kings Bay AS on the performance and development of RiS. We have been discussing bug fixing, new functionality, and improvements. The four partners also constitute the steering board for RiS 3.0. The steering board is responsible for decisions on further development of RiS.

A security test of RiS 3.0 was performed late in 2022 by external experts. The security report indicated a high level of security.

At the end of the year, there were no unresolved bugs categorised as High or Critical. While 2022 was a demanding year with RiS 3.0, it can be concluded that the RiS 3.0 platform is stabilized, and that the future of RiS looks very promising

Expected changes regarding booking services as well as new regulations may require development of new functionality in 2023.



There has been a lot of good feedback from users, and there has also been suggested improvements and new functionality. We expect that the follow up on suggested improvements, and further development planned for 2023, will demonstrate the benefits of the new and updated platform.

Funding activities (AFG and SSG)

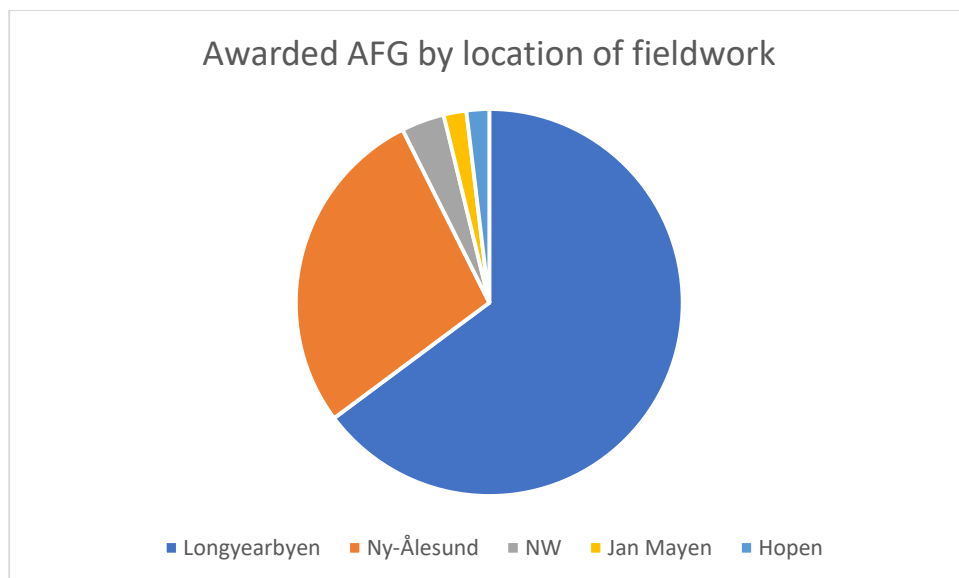
For the 2022 calls there was a surplus carried over from previous calls. This made it possible to increase the funding in 2022.

Arctic Field Grant (AFG)

For AFG 2023 (application deadline November 2022) we received 109 applications and allocated NOK 4.02 million to 55 projects.

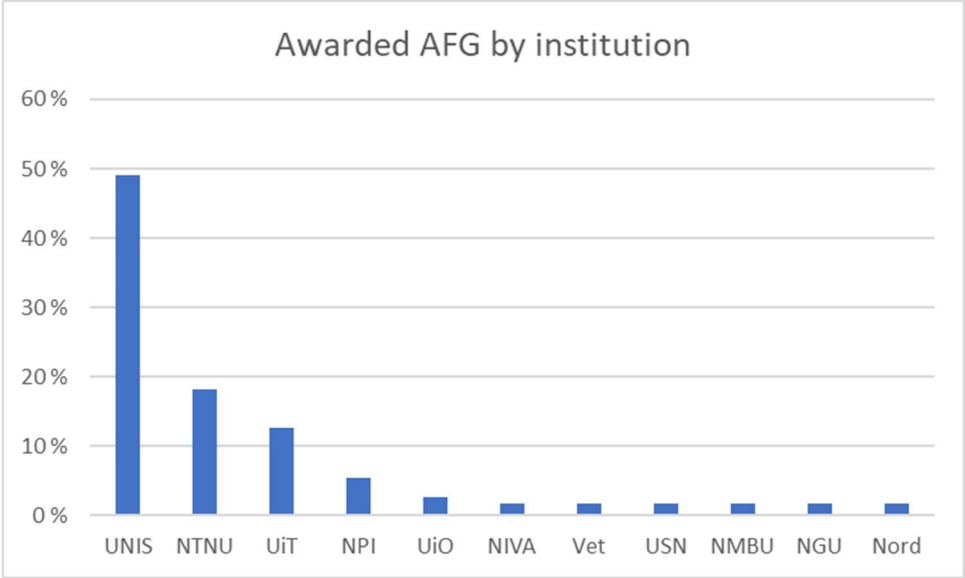
	Amount announced (NOK)	Amount requested (NOK)	Applications total	Applications funded	Success rate
AFG 2022	4.0mill	6.47 mill	89	72	81%
AFG 2023	4.0 mill	8.68 mill	109	55	54%

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.

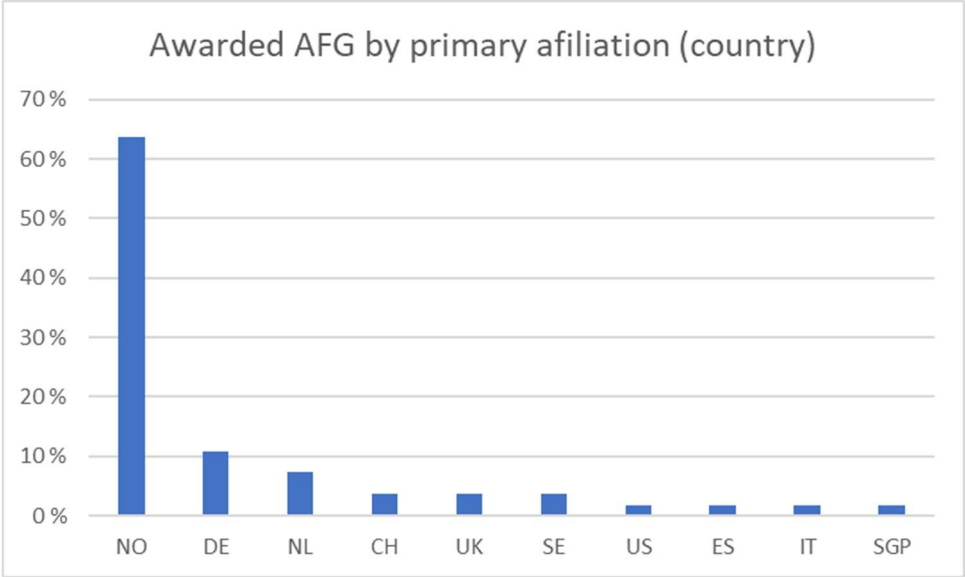




The grant is intended for students in master's and doctoral programs and for researchers who are studying at, employed at, or are collaborating with a Norwegian institution.



A fair share of the applicants collaborate with Norwegian institutions, but have their primary affiliation in another country:





Svalbard Strategic Grant (SSG)

Svalbard Strategic Grant funds workshops, networks, and collaboration projects 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.

	Amount announced (NOK)	Amount requested (NOK)	Applications total	Applications funded	Success rate
SSG 2022	5.5 mill	7.68 mill	19	14	74%

Communication and advisory activities

It is part of the mandate of SSF to provide information, support, and guidance to researchers and institutions. It is also an aim to develop and strengthen collaboration between researchers and institutions. Moreover, SSF is to maintain contact with the research community and with other actors in Svalbard.

In 2022 we

- attended several SSG workshops,
- Met with the Governor of Svalbard,
- Helped researchers visiting us in the Svalbard Science Centre,
- Provided advice and assistance to the Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund in connection with research-related applications.

We also attended events such as:

- Arctic Science Summit Week, 24 March - 1 April
- NERC Arctic Research Station Open Day, February
- Arctic Circle 2022
- NySMAC meetings in March and October