

Svalbard Science Forum Annual Report 2024

Approved SSF 2025-1 9 April 2025

The Svalbard Science Forum (SSF) was established in 1998. Its mandate is dictated from the Ministry of Education and Research. The mandate, revised most recently in 2019, states that the overall objective of the SSF is to contribute to increasing the scientific quality of the research in Svalbard. The Forum shall contribute to good coordination of, and offer accessible information about all research in Svalbard, and contribute to making Svalbard attractive to Norwegian and international researchers. The Forum members represent major stakeholders in Svalbard research, i.e., the main actors that facilitate or conduct research. In 2024 there were eight members and one observer in the Forum.

The members of the SSF are:

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

The Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute (AARI) Barentsburg, has been suspended temporarily as a member of the Forum since February 2022.

The mandate gives The Research Council of Norway (RCN) the responsibility for the SSF and the day-to-day operation of the secretariat, development of the Research in Svalbard (RiS) portal, management of the two funding schemes: the Arctic Field Grant (AFG) and the Svalbard Strategic Grant (SSG), and tasks associated with information sharing and strengthening collaboration between both individual researchers and research institutions in Svalbard. SSFs mandate also says that SSF shall contribute to arranging the biannual Svalbard Science Conference (SSC).

The SSF secretariat is manned with personnel located in the Svalbard Science Center, Longyearbyen and resources from the RCN's main office in Oslo. The responsibilities of the Forum are executed by holding Forum meetings twice annually and preparing the background documents for the items on the agenda. Typically, these are about RiS, the funding schemes, and the framework for research in Svalbard such as regulations. Information exchange to enable coordination between the members of the Forum is always on the agenda.

In 2024 the SSF secretariat worked towards the ambitions set out in the mandate.

The following points can be highlighted regarding achieving the different objectives in the mandate:

Contribute to increased scientific quality in research in Svalbard

SSF contributes to increasing the scientific quality of the research conducted in Svalbard by promoting the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) for data sharing and by supporting the international nature of the science conducted on Svalbard. The AFGs in particular promote access to young, international scientists to work with Norwegian Institutes – broadening the horizons of work conducted in the archipelago.

Contribute to good coordination of research activities in Svalbard and develop and strengthen collaboration between both individual researchers and research institutions in Svalbard

Coordination and collaboration are enabled through the RiS portal, the two funding schemes (AFG and SSG), the biannual Svalbard Science Conference and the Forum meetings.

Offer integrated and accessible information about all research in Svalbard

The RiS portal offers open information about most research projects in Svalbard, with keywords, location of fieldworks etc. The portal provides open access to anyone who wants to search among registered projects. It is mandatory to register all research projects that require permission from the Governor, all projects executed in Ny-Ålesund and Hornsund, and all projects funded by the RCN and the Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund in the RiS portal. For all other projects registration is encouraged. This implies that information about most research activities in Svalbard is registered in the RiS portal.

Contribute to place Svalbard in a larger pan-Arctic and global perspective

In the Svalbard Strategic Grant call for 2024 (see below) seven priorities were listed, among them was contributing to placing Svalbard research in a pan-Arctic and global perspective. Two of the eleven funded projects have collaboration across the Arctic or globally as an explicit objective. In the 2025 SSG call the same priority will be given, as well as prioritizing projects that increase mobility and cooperation between research localities in Svalbard and Greenland.

Contribute to SIOS becoming an effective tool for the utilization of infrastructure in and around Svalbard

Collaboration between SSF and SIOS resulted in SIOS offering help and training in data management to support projects funded in the SSG 2024 call (see below). Discussions on how data can be shared between the SIOS Observation Facility Catalogue and RiS were continued in 2024. We plan to develop this functionality in 2025. All members of SFF (except RCN and Kings Bay) are also members of SIOS.

Contribute to arrange the Svalbard Science Conference as the central international meeting place for dialogue on research in Svalbard

The 4th Svalbard Science Conference was held in Oslo 31 October-1 November 2023. In 2024 the SSF started the planning the 5th Svalbard Science Conference which will be arranged 28-29th October 2025 and secured the resources (funding and organization) for the conference.

Support to the Governor of Svalbard

The SSF has a role as an advisory body on issues regarding research in Svalbard. This is implemented by SSF being a discussion arena and a proponent for research interests in all cases that concern scientific activity in Svalbard such as plans and regulations that affect researchers and research activities. Replies to public consultations are, if time permits, discussed and agreed upon in a Forum meeting, and submitted as a Forum reply. The SSF secretariat also supports the Governor with assessments of proposals to Svalbard's Environmental Protection Fund twice a year and provides the Governor information on the research projects that are registered in RiS.

Research in Svalbard portal (RiS)

In 2024, RiS was stable and had no downtime. The secretariat has worked closely with the other owners, The Norwegian Polar Institute, The Governor of Svalbard, and Kings Bay AS on the performance and development of RiS. The four partners constitute the RiS Steering Group and meet four times a year. The Steering Group is responsible for decisions on RiS development projects.

A new functionality, mandatory fields for project information, was implemented for project registrations in 2024. This improves the data quality on the projects in RiS and caters to the needs of researchers and the Governor. Additional processes for improving the data quality and search functions were initiated and will be continued in 2025. In addition, a substantial update of the booking system at Kings Bay improving and making the booking system more efficient was started in 2024. The RiS Privacy Statement on the principles for managing personal data that is registered in RiS has also been updated.

In 2024 the RiS User Group has been reestablished being represented by RiS operation personnel from all the RiS owners.

RiS ownership structure is administered through the RiS Partner Group where all owners are represented in an annual meeting. The Partner group meeting for 2024 was postponed to January 2025. The Partner Group has decided to revise the Partner Agreement in 2025. An assessment of the data security in RiS will also be initiated in 2025.

Forum meetings

There were two meetings in the Forum in 2024. SSF 1/24 was held in a hybrid (digital / physical) format 18 April. SSF 2/24 was held in-person in Longyearbyen 30 August, followed by an excursion to the Polish Polar Station in Hornsund for all Forum members.

The RiS portal, the two funding schemes, and the Svalbard Science Conference 2025 were discussed at both meetings.

In May a White Paper on Svalbard (St.26.2023-2024), that outlines the Norwegian policy in Svalbard for the next years was published. The Forum discussed the White Paper and its possible implications for the SSF and research activities in Svalbard in general. The White paper states that a new Svalbard Science Office will be established. Based upon these ambitions it is perceived that the SSF mandate will need to be adjusted.

Overview of finances, personnel, etc.

RCN secretariat in Svalbard

The secretariat staff in Longyearbyen consisted of two research advisers. Salaries and operational costs for the SSF-secretariat and the Forum are parts of the ordinary budget of the RCN.

Grants from RCN/Svalbard Science Forum

The grants from RCN/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 (NOK 1.5 mill to AFG). The Ministry of Climate and Environment channelled in addition NOK 546 000 to AFG via the Norwegian Polar Institute. Further details about the funding activities are given below.

Research in Svalbard (RiS)

The total costs of operation maintenance and further development of Research in Svalbard (RiS) were 2 985 239NOK plus VAT, of which operation and maintenance constituted 1 500 000 NOK plus VAT¹ and further development constituted 1 485 239NOK plus VAT.

The expenses are covered by the project partners as follows: The Research Council of Norway (60%); The Norwegian Polar Institute (15%); Kings Bay AS (15%); and The Governor of Svalbard (10%).

Funding activities (AFG and SSG)

The two funding schemes Arctic Field Grant (AFG) and Svalbard Strategic Grant (SSG) are announced annually. SSG has a deadline for applications in March, and AFG in November. In this annual report the SSG 2024 and the AFG 2025 are reported because both had deadlines for proposals in 2024.

Svalbard Strategic Grant (SSG) - deadline for proposals 13 March 2024

The Svalbard Strategic Grant 2024 was announced early in 2024 for support for activities taking place between May 2024 and October 2026.

Svalbard Strategic Grant funds workshops, networks, and collaboration projects with relevance to Svalbard, to enhance coordination, collaboration and open sharing of data. Pre-projects and the planning of larger projects can also be funded. It is well suited for development of the Ny-Ålesund

¹ The Governor and Kings Bay AS are exempt from VAT, but NPI and RCN (with headquarters in mainland Norway) pay ordinary VAT.

flagship programs (and workshops before and after the Svalbard Science Conference for conference years).

The SSG call for 2024 received 19 applications. Eleven projects were approved for funding and NOK 3.993 million were allocated.

	Amount announced (NOK)	Amount requested (NOK)	Applications total	Applications funded	Success rate
SSG 2022	5.5 mill.	7.68 mill.	19	14	74%
SSG 2023	4 mill.	4.17 mill.	11	10	90%
SSG 2024	4 mill.	6.94 mill.	19	11	57%

Arctic Field Grant (AFG) - deadline for proposals 13 November 2024

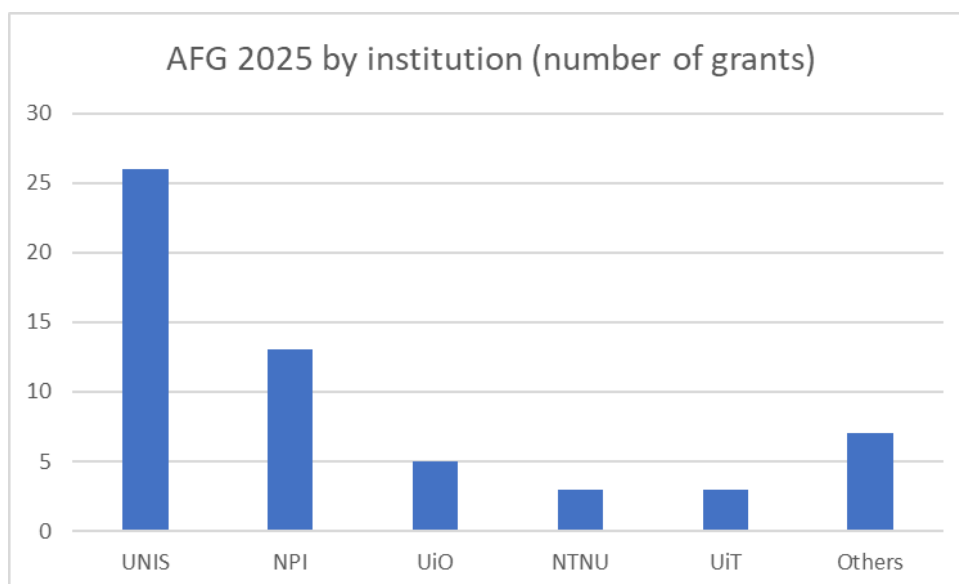
The Arctic Field Grant 2025 was announced in autumn 2024 for support to fieldwork in Svalbard and Jan Mayen, taking place between March 2025 and February 2026. The grant supports fieldwork for students in master's and PhD programs and researchers who are studying at, employed at, or collaborating with a Norwegian institution.

The AFG call for work to be conducted in 2025 received 104 applications, a number similar to that of the previous year. Fifty-seven projects were approved for funding and NOK 5.95 million were allocated.

	Amount announced (NOK)	Amount requested (NOK)	Applications total	Applications funded	Success rate
AFG 2023	4.0 mill.	8.68 mill.	109	55	54%
AFG 2024	6.0 mill.	10.16 mill.	113	64	57%
AFG 2025	6.0 mill.	10.15 mill.	104	57	55%

The AFG call, like the previous one, included an earmarked sum of NOK 1.5 mill to strengthen Norwegian research in Ny-Ålesund. Fourteen proposals for fieldworks in Ny-Ålesund were funded by the earmarked sum. Overall, 35% of the projects will take place in Ny-Ålesund/Kongsfjorden, and 65% elsewhere on Svalbard.

All the funded applicants collaborate with Norwegian research institutions, and a Norwegian institution is the Project Owner. UNIS is the institution with most awarded Arctic Field Grants 2024 with as many as 45% of the grants.



Selected 2024 activities in short

Two Forum meetings were held in 2024. One meeting was in-person, followed by an excursion to the Polish Polar Station in Hornsund.

By the end of 2024 there were approximately 590 active projects; 13618 publications; and more than 3527 datasets registered in RiS.

The SSF secretariat participated in and gave presentations at several conferences and workshops, such as SSG workshops, NERC Arctic Research Station Open Day and project meetings, and gave presentations about the SSF to visiting delegations to Svalbard Science Center / UNIS.

RCN/SFF attended the NySMAC meetings in March (Edinburgh / digital) and October (Rome).

The SSF secretariat provided support to the Governor of Svalbard on the following:

- The RiS portal was developed to better cater to the needs of the Governor
- The Forum gave advice and provided data regarding research activities in 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 57 fieldwork periods and 11 workshops/projects respectively.