

Call for Focus group proposals, Platform Plant Protection, SLU

The Platform Plant Protection at SLU is launching a two-stage call for researchers at SLU for funding the establishment of a maximum of four focus groups that will work with different areas of plant protection in Sweden. This call is part of the strategic action plan of the Platform Plant Protection (www.slu.se/platformplantprotection/strategic-action-plan) to bring together new constellations of scientists that address plant protection problems in close collaboration with stakeholders. We urge you to carefully read the strategic action plan in preparing your proposal.

In Sweden and globally, plant protection is a major component for food security and environmental health. Across the European Union, plant protection directives are developed and implemented and it is an important area for society and research.

SLU has a broad and diverse expertise in the area of plant protection with approximately 100 researchers engaged in a wide range of approaches and applications that are practised for protecting crops and forests from damage, with base in a number of biological sciences, e.g. ecology, evolution, physiology and cell biology.

In general, plant protection research deals with minimizing yield losses in forestry, agriculture and horticulture by a number of organisms that are considered pests: e.g. birds, mammals, weeds, insects, fungi, bacteria, nematodes and viruses.

The aim of the focus groups is to achieve results on practical, solution-oriented problems by using this wealth of expertise at SLU in close collaboration and dialogue with stakeholders.

What is a focus group?

We will provide a short introduction to focus groups below, but please read the more detailed description in the strategic action plan of the platform in developing your application.

A focus group has the purpose to explore problems, opportunities, and solutions in a delimited area by sharing, collecting and summarizing knowledge and experience between researchers and stakeholders.

The following activities will be required of a focus group:

- Delimiting its specific area of interest,
- Basing its work on active participation of and dialogue among stakeholders and researchers,
- Identifying problems and opportunities in the defined area of interest,
- Summarizing current practices and scientific knowledge,
- Developing possible solutions to the problems identified,
- Based on this, developing proposals for future research and practical solutions,
- Dissemination of the knowledge gathered.

The outcome of the focus group should be presented in a final report which is made available on the website of the Platform Plant Protection. Additional results of the focus group work can include ideas for educational activities for stakeholders (extension courses), strategic monitoring of funding sources, funding proposals or other outcomes.

Composition, funding and results of the focus group

Each focus group consists of a *core group* of approximately two to four researchers and possibly stakeholders. It is the core group that will initially apply for funding from the Platform Plant Protection. The core group is responsible for planning and reporting the activities of the focus group. The core group must be led by researchers from SLU, including at least two faculties (see fig 1 in the strategic action plan).

Members of the larger focus group include more researchers, mainly (but not necessarily exclusively) from SLU, and stakeholders such as farmers, foresters and other practitioners, advisers, and representatives from governmental and non-governmental organisations, all based in Sweden. The number of participants in the focus group should range between five and 20 persons to sufficiently cover the selected area and be effective (see fig 1 in the strategic action plan).

Each group of successful applicants of stage 2 will receive funding of approximately 1 MSEK to conduct their work. This should cover all costs related to the focus group work, e.g. for meetings (facilitator, travel costs, venue, and accommodation), salaries and other expenses.

The focus groups are expected to present their results and recommendations, at the latest, in June 2019. At least two face-to-face meetings are anticipated per year during the working period of the focus group.

Each focus group is expected to deliver the following to the Platform Plant Protection (see also fig 2 in the strategic action plan):

- A discussion paper that summarizes the identified problems that the focus group will deal with
- Overview of current practical and scientific knowledge related to the identified problems
- A final report summarizing the group findings and recommendations for research and solutions
- Dissemination of results in popular form.

The report will be made available at the website of the Platform Plant Protection.

Who can apply?

A core group of 2-4 researchers employed at SLU from two or more faculties will be the main applicant. Participation of stakeholders in the core group will be a merit but is not essential. Please note that the application includes two stages (see under *Application* below),

in which only applications that have been invited for the second call need to specify members of the entire focus group.

Focus group themes

Both basic and applied sciences should be taken into account when forming the larger focus group. The focus area of the focus group should be linked to plant protection with particular relevance for Sweden. Representation in the wider focus group of different research disciplines including basic and applied sciences and novel collaborations are meriting.

Each focus group should concentrate on a plant protection area relevant for Sweden that is broad but delimited. Examples of possible areas are: open field vegetable production, monitoring and risk management, perennial woody crops, agricultural production, and urban plant protection. *Please note* that these areas are examples and that the platform welcomes other ideas.

More information

Please read more about focus groups and the background of the Platform Plant Protection in the strategic action plan (www.slu.se/platformplantprotection/strategic-action-plan) and on the platform website www.slu.se/platformplantprotection.

Application

Applications for the first call should contain a 'Focus group plan' that can be a maximum of 3 pages (A4) long (2.5cm margins around, written with the font Times New Roman 12, single line spacing) and should include:

- Core group members
- Focus group area
- General aims and specific targets
- Background
- Brief description of possible collaborating stakeholders and scientists and their roles in the wider focus group (confirmed contact with these is not required for stage 1)
- Time plan including milestones and outputs
- Budget outline

The deadline for the first call is the 15th of February 2017; 23:59:59 (GMT+1). Applicants will receive feedback and will be informed whether or not they are invited for the second call by the 6th of March 2017.

Applications for the second call can only be made by invitation and detailed further instructions will be included in that invitation. The deadline for the second call is the 12th of May 2017; 23:59:59 (GMT+1).

Evaluation

Applications will be read, evaluated and ranked by the members of the platform's steering committee.

Criteria for evaluation

Priority will be given to focus groups of interdisciplinary nature. Other important criteria for evaluating applications are that the focus group

1. Contributes to improved knowledge and solutions for plant protection in Sweden and beyond,
2. Develops dialogue and collaborations among plant protection researchers and stakeholders,
3. Provides up to date information on the state of the art in the defined area,
4. Generates research proposals with increased chance of attracting external funding,
5. Adds value compared to other stakeholder-researcher networks,
6. Strengthens SLU's role as a sectors university for agronomy, forestry and horticulture.

Where to send your application

Mail your application electronically as a pdf-file to Marnie Hancke with cc to Riccardo Bommarco and Katja Fedrowitz. Marnie.Hancke@slu.se; Riccardo.Bommarco@slu.se; Katja.Fedrowitz@slu.se.

Further questions?

Please contact the platform coordinator Katja.Fedrowitz@slu.se or the chair Riccardo.Bommarco@slu.se.

We look forward to receiving your applications!

The Steering Committee
Platform Plant Protection SLU