



## CASE STUDY

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# Driving Collaboration and Innovation in Nordic Research

## NordForsk Profile

Nordic research funding organisation, established in 2005 by the Nordic Council of Ministers (the official body for inter-governmental co-operation in the Nordic Region).

### **Aims and objectives**

To be an effective facilitator of research collaboration that makes an impact, ensures that the research is of high international quality and delivers Nordic added value\*.

- Facilitate Nordic research collaboration.
- Enhance the impact of Nordic research collaboration.
- Ensure the efficient and transparent management of NordForsk's activities and administration.

## Introduction

NordForsk has emerged as a pioneering force in enhancing research collaboration and promoting innovation across the Nordic region. With a strong focus on fostering interdisciplinary cooperation, NordForsk has succeeded in creating a vibrant network of researchers, institutions, and stakeholders committed to addressing societal challenges and advancing knowledge in various fields. This case study explores how NordForsk has embraced innovation with the adoption of Researchfish to shape the future of Nordic research landscape.

To gain deeper insights into NordForsk's advancements in data-centric analysis and their implementation of Researchfish as a supportive tool, our team had the opportunity to meet with Simon Jernroth, NordForsk's Analytics Officer, and Guttorm Aanes, Head of Communications.

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**Simon Jernroth**

NordForsk, Analytics Officer

## The significance of impact in NordForsk’s mission

NordForsk sought to develop an innovative method for effectively measuring and monitoring the impact of research.

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Before adopting Researchfish the principal investigator of each project submitted an annual progress report, resulting in a standardized report that could be exported as a PDF. However, this reporting method provided limited analytical opportunities. “The main problem with this (relying on an annual report), was that it was impossible to generate aggregated data for the activities, and to compare between projects and research areas,” recalls Simon Jernroth

The adoption of Researchfish has enabled NordForsk to obtain more systematic and consistent reports, with a greater focus on impact and accuracy. “We desired results and effects that could be quantified and easily communicated through numbers and figures,” recalls Simon Jernroth.

## The role of Researchfish in Helping NordForsk attain its objectives

NordForsk adopted Researchfish rather than building an in-house system because it is specifically designed for research funding organizations. It offers a smooth user experience, streamlined processes, and comprehensive in-product help, reducing the chances of encountering pitfalls. “We don’t need to have in-house system operators with

### What is Nordic Added Value?

Nordic Added Value is the outcomes of what could otherwise be undertaken at the national level, but where concretely positive effects are generated through collaboration at the Nordic level. NordForsk has special interest in two thematic categories: added value that contributes mainly to the research ecosystem and added value that contributes to society at large.

Researchfish” they explain “Researchfish has already done the necessary groundwork for implementing such a system, making it a more straightforward and certain choice compared to building our own system”

NordForsk now easily obtains rich and aggregated data, allowing for comparisons across all types of awards. Plus, the output format of Researchfish facilitates the construction of relational databases, enabling a great spectrum of analytics in particular related to the evaluation of Nordic added value.

## Maximizing data potential: NordForsk’s approach

NordForsk uses Researchfish data to produce **Impact** Reports and to populate the database that powers their Impact Dashboard.

The Impact Report presents a comprehensive summary of the results and outcomes reported by NordForsk funded projects. It includes data on publications, policy influence, dissemination activities, and other indicators of impact. The report is shared with key stakeholders and published in both physical and digital formats.

The interactive dashboard relies on two primary data sources – Insights, NordForsk’s central reporting system that contains qualitative data, demographics, and project funding information, and Researchfish. “We have developed a database model based on these data sources, which feeds into our Power BI-built dashboard. This dashboard provides essential analytics and descriptive statistics that we use” they explain.

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Although the current model is a prototype, NordForsk plans to further refine it by harmonizing the database structure and integrating automated updates to a larger extent. This will create a comprehensive analytical system for all quantitative impact metrics. In the future, with the integration of a sophisticated AI-language model, it may also enable narrative summaries or qualitative analysis.

To gather data on Nordic Added Value, an additional question was added to the standard Researchfish question set. This is used to provide a focal point for discussions during the grant application and review processes.

## Communication and transparency

Sharing the information collected is of utmost importance to NordForsk, and they make use of various channels and opportunities to do so. These include updating their website, sending out newsletters, and engaging on social media platforms. They also

directly communicate with relevant stakeholders and present findings during meetings and conferences.

“We have decided to host an annual webinar on impact and communication, and the first one was arranged early this year. With great success!” says Guttorm Aanes

In a recent webinar Simon Jernroth, NordForsk’s Analytics Officer delved into NordForsk’s methodologies for measuring and communicating research impact. He discussed the intricacies of impact measurement with Magnus Gulbrandsen, Professor at the University of Oslo and engaged with Tomas Sjöblom, a Research Communication Specialist, to discuss effective communication strategies for impact. **Watch now!**

## Encouraging researcher involvement

NordForsk takes steps to ensure that researchers fully understand the purpose and benefits of reporting on Researchfish. This information is communicated through various means such as emails, meetings, newsletters, and the organization’s website, ensuring that researchers recognize the significance of their contributions.

## Future aspirations

The data visibility and insights provided by Researchfish will play a crucial role in supporting NordForsk to adapt to the future requirements of research in the Nordic region. NordForsk is already seen as a pioneer in this area, with influence in parliaments and ministries, and other research funding organisations it collaborates with.

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After using Researchfish for two years, NordForsk launched a new strategy last year with a greater focus on creating, documenting, and communicating impact.

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NordForsk, Analytics Officer

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NordForsk expects changes in research impact in the future, such as addressing challenges like quantitative metrics, harmonizing data between sources, and developing reliable automated analysis processes.

## Embracing the Researchfish platform

The transition to the Researchfish process was relatively swift, taking only a few months to complete. During this period, the onboarding team provided assistance through forms, templates, manuals, and general support throughout.

As phased adoption was used it was decided to view the first year as a learning phase. The limited amount of data would be challenging to generate a meaningful analysis for the initial data collection period. Following the second data collection period, NordForsk were confident in launching their first Impact Report and plan to release annually.

A considerable advantage in adopting Researchfish was the ability to gather and present data for our entire portfolio for the first time. “This not only allowed us to showcase the results and impacts achieved but also enabled us to conduct valuable analyses in specific areas such as the Arctic and Societal Security”.

## Summary

NordForsk’s adoption of Researchfish has proven to be a transformative step in enhancing the measurement, monitoring, and communication of research impact in the Nordic region. By implementing Researchfish, NordForsk has been able to obtain rich and aggregated data, facilitating comparisons across different projects and research areas. This has allowed NordForsk to produce comprehensive Impact Reports and develop an interactive Impact Dashboard that provides essential analytics and descriptive statistics. NordForsk’s commitment to communication and transparency is evident through their use of various channels to share information and engage with stakeholders.

NordForsk’s emphasis on researcher involvement and their future aspirations for automated analysis processes and qualitative report formats demonstrate their dedication to continuous improvement and innovation. Overall, NordForsk’s embrace of Researchfish has positioned them as a pioneering force in research collaboration and impact assessment, shaping the future of the Nordic research landscape.