To the members of the IFA board.

The reason for this letter is the suggestion from Ledningsgruppen about the ranking of the recent infrastructure applications. We have some question marks about the procedure and would like to suggest to the board members

1. To ensure that relevant bodies within the organization, for example the strategy group, are involved in the **process** and the preparation ("beredning").
2. To require a project-based **motivation** for the outcome and the ranking, which contains a summary of each project and how they meet or not meet the criteria;
3. To improve the **transparency** of the whole procedure, including the call itself.
4. To clarify or request a clarification of the **amount of funding** to be distributed, and over which **time-span**.

Members of our program have experience from infrastructure funding assessment at local as well as national level and can assure that these criteria are standard.
We acknowledge the difficulty of Ledningsgruppen to evaluate the current infrastructure applications, given the fact that most of its members had a conflict of interest by being co-applicants. At the same time, it is important that also members of Ledningsgruppen should not be excluded from the possibility to apply for funding.
However, only a transparent and thorough process, where the risk for bias is kept at a minimum, can ensure that the support for the local infrastructure fund remains, and the willingness of each program to allocate their internal research funding for it. This is particularly true given the low frequency of IFA infrastructure calls (the previous one was in 2020).

Process: One central idea of styr-och-led was to replace Beredningsgruppen as a consultative committee by expert committees. Ledningsgruppen and board would choose the appropriate committee according to the topic. Given the strategic aspects of the infrastructure funding, the former strategy group comes into mind. It represented vast and broad expertise and had representatives from all levels in the organization. It is not entirely clear to us who was involved this year. According to the brief documentation, it seems that the assessment was carried out by two members of Ledningsgruppen without input from any other expert group. This composition is less ideal for several reasons:

- With only two referees, there is a larger risk that important aspects are overlooked in the process, or that different opinions are not handled in a proper way.
- It is important that the group of referees represents a broad range of expertise, including experimental physics at small and large infrastructures.

We would therefore recommend to appoint a larger group outside Ledningsgruppen to evaluate the applications. The special case of is year, when the department head submitted an application, can be handled by appointing external experts on infrastructures. These can be found either at other universities or at other departments at TekNat. Referees from e.g. engineering sciences and chemistry are evaluating physics infrastructures at the national level and there are several in-house experts. In this way, no IFA employees need to rank applications of their own superiors in the line management.

Written motivation: A central key to avoid suspicions of bias is a well-documented assessment. In this respect, we dare to say that one line of reasoning for each low-ranked application, and zero lines of reasoning for each high-ranked application is insufficient. Furthermore, the ranking should be project-based, not person-based. The labeling of the applications in terms of PI names rather than the project itself does not reflect this. Preferably, a rejected or accepted application contains a short summary of the project, showing that there is no misunderstanding between referees and applicants, followed by an account for how the application meets or does not meet the different criteria. The project is addressed by its name and its content, rather than the names of the applicants.

Transparency: It should be clear that each decision process involves a balance between control and trust. Decisions can involve confidentiality aspects. It might not always be possible to reveal each aspect of a decision. The more important is transparency whenever it is possible, i.e. a well-documented decision finding process. A large degree of transparency from Ledningsgruppen to the board demonstrates a stronger autonomy of the board, a greater respect of the board's integrity and a greater trust from the IFA employees in the board and the decision-making processes.

In addition, the call itself needs a larger degree of crafting and should be discussed within different preparatory bodies within IFA. The last call was written in haste, from scratch, during a board meeting (one of us who was in the previous board admits that this was not optimal).

Funding size and time-span: It should be made clear if the funding is only for 2025 or if the infrastructure fund will be locked for another five years.

Additional remarks: We should not hide the fact that we at KF ourselves may be biased in our perception of the results of the evaluation of the infrastructure applications. Nonetheless, we would like to point to an aspect where we do not understand the overall strategy of Ledningsgruppen. The strategy of IFA was defined as one general aspect for the evaluation of the infrastructure applications. In this light, we do not understand how it can be held against Papenbrock's application that it is part of our priority 2 in KoF. In the KoF process we have aligned our program strategy with the IFA strategy. The application proposes to develop a component of IFA's AI for physics. At the same time it serves as an educational offer for students to use machine-learning for particle tracking in an Uppsala in-house experiment. In addition, priority 2 is, in our understanding, something we plan to do, but that cannot be done entirely with our own funding but requires additional funding from IFA. This was written in the KoF instructions, and now we are applying for additional funding from IFA to do what we had planned to do. If the other applications were all priority 1, it would imply that funding already exists for their realization, hence no need for additional funding. If they were not mentioned in KoF at all, it raises the question whether there is a KoF-related strategy and a KoF-unrelated strategy. Why is only the KoF-unrelated strategy part eligible for the infrastructure call? Wouldn't it be better that IFA has one overarching strategy and that KoF initiatives at the IFA level go hand in hand with other funding decisions at the IFA level? In any case, information on eligibility with respect to KoF should have been made available in the call if it is used as a motivation for rejection.

We are aware that we suggest to the board to create extra work for Ledningsgruppen. However, we talk about a significant amount of money that is fueled by the FFF of the programs and redistributed in the process. Therefore, we believe that it makes sense to define now how things should be handled in the future. It is not needed to reinvent the wheel with every round of applications if one agrees on general procedures, including also how to handle in a practical way potential conflicts of interest.

Finally, we would like to point out that funding opportunities exist at the national level for large-scale infrastructures of national interest. For the local infrastructure fund to serve its purpose, and remain its legitimacy, it is reasonable to discuss whether the local infrastructure call should or should not include infrastructures which are eligible for national large-scale funding.

Best regards,

Karin Schönning and Stefan Leupold (for the nuclear physics division)