



## INSTRUCTIONS FOR REVIEWING RESEARCH PROPOSALS – PANELS

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### 1 Role of experts and the Academy of Finland

The Academy of Finland grants funding to the best researchers and research teams as well as to the most promising junior researchers. Experts are invited to review the scientific quality and innovativeness of the submitted research proposals. In most cases, the review is finalised in expert panel meetings.

After receiving the reviews, either the Academy's Research Council members, or in the case of a research programme, the Steering Committee, rank the applications for funding decisions. Research Councils or sub-committees of the Steering Committees are then responsible for the final funding decisions. The decisions are mainly based on the peer review, but science policy-related factors may also play a role in the decisions. Examples of such factors are promoting equal opportunities for both genders, the advancement of junior researchers' careers, as well as the economic, environmental, societal and technological impacts of research. At all levels of the evaluation process, you are advised to pay attention to potential breakthrough research containing risks (cf. the evaluation item 1.1).

### 2 Expert panel meeting

The expert panel consists of esteemed, mostly international researchers in the field. **The panel members have access to all applications assigned to the panel**, barring conflicts of interest (see below). Each application is assigned to at least two panel members who are asked to prepare preliminary reviews. All preliminary reviews are made available to the panel members preferably before the meeting. The panel shall review all the applications assigned to it and prepare one joint review report for each proposal based on the discussions and the preliminary reviews. The Academy staff will assist the panel in preparing the final review reports. In some cases, an application may be sent to a specialist who is not a member of the panel but who may provide additional knowledge pertaining to a particular field.

### 3 Evaluation

For reviewing applications, please use the online services available on our website (see the document “For Application Reviewers Using the Online Services”).

There are two main items in the evaluation, (1) the research plan, and (2) competence of the applicant and quality of the research environment. In the evaluation of the research plan, the key issues are the scientific quality and innovativeness of the research plan as well as potential for breakthrough research. The main items are divided into sub-items as follows:

#### 1 Research plan (rating 1–6)

1.1 Scientific quality and innovativeness of the research plan (sub-rating 1–6)

1.2 Feasibility of the research plan (sub-rating 1–6)

1.3 Ethical questions (to be answered if relevant; *no numerical rating*)

#### 2 Competence of applicant and quality of research environment (rating 1–6)

2.1 Competence and expertise of the applicant(s) (sub-rating 1–6)

2.2 Research team and environment (sub-rating 1–6)

2.3 Significance of research collaborations and researcher mobility (sub-rating 1–6)

2.4 Research consortium (to be answered if relevant; *no numerical rating*)

In case you are reviewing **a research programme application**, there is an additional sub-item “Relevance of the project to the research programme” under Item 1 (Research Plan).

Please write comments for each sub-item. These comments are particularly valuable to the Research Council in its decision-making. After funding decisions, the review is available to the applicant. The reviews will provide applicants with important feedback.

Numerical evaluation of the sub-items and Item 1 (Research plan) and Item 2 (Competence of applicant and quality of research environment) is made with ratings ranging from 1 (weak) to 6 (outstanding).

Finally, you are asked to give your final rating and overall assessment of the application including the strengths and weaknesses as well as possible additional comments. Please note that the final rating should not be a mathematical average of the sub-ratings. It is important to comment both on the strengths and the weaknesses of the application.

Please rate the application using the scale below. There should be consistency between the numerical rating and written comments.

6 = outstanding, stands out with exceptional novelty, innovativeness and renewal of science at global level

5 = excellent, extremely good in international comparison – no significant elements to be improved

4 = very good, contains some elements that could be improved

3 = good, contains elements that can be improved

2 = unsatisfactory, in need of substantial modification or improvement

1 = weak, severe flaws that are intrinsic to the proposed project or the application

#### 4 Different funding instruments

The evaluation form is used for several of the Academy’s funding instruments. These are briefly described below.

**Academy Projects (3– 4-year funding).** Academy-project funding is the key funding opportunity provided by the Academy for research projects, designed to promote the quality of research, the diversity of research and its capacity for renewal. Academy-project funding provides researchers with an opportunity to carry out scientifically ambitious research, to achieve new breakthroughs and to engage in high-risk research. The aim is to attain internationally as high a scientific standard of work as possible and to strengthen the creativity, capacity and impact of research. Funding is granted primarily to teams composed of researchers who have completed their doctorate.

Funding is granted towards the direct costs of a research project to cover expenses arising from, for example, the research team's working hours, research costs, travel, domestic and international cooperation and mobility, work and researcher training abroad, and the preparation of international projects. The Academy encourages researchers to international mobility that will support their research, for example, so that a researcher hired for a project works abroad for a fixed period. A project may also hire a foreign researcher who already works in Finland or who will come to work within the Finnish scientific community. Funding to cover the salary costs of the principal investigator of an Academy Project may be granted for a period of no more than twelve months. These funds are intended to facilitate implementation of the Academy Project and they will only be made available for well-substantiated reasons in terms of research.

Academy Projects and research programme projects may also be applied for by a **consortium of several research projects working at different sites**. A consortium has a common research plan submitted by a consortium leader. Besides the research plan and the abstract, the main application of the consortium shall also include the lists of publications and curricula vitae for the leaders of the research teams (principal investigators of the sub-projects) participating in the consortium. **Please write only one review report of a research consortium application.** In this review report, the joint research plan and the competence of **all** principal investigators should be discussed, as well as added value of the consortium for the attainment of the objectives of the whole project (cf. the evaluation item 2.4).

**Research programmes** are composed of a number of closely related projects in the same field of research or addressing a specified theme. The general aim is to produce knowledge in the field/problems specified in the Research Programme Memorandum, to raise the overall quality of research, to promote interdisciplinarity and international cooperation, to establish and strengthen the knowledge base within the field concerned, to promote research careers and networking among researchers and to intensify researcher training. Research programmes aim at generating substantial added value when compared to funding projects in the general call.

**Postdoctoral Researchers (3– year funding).** The aim of the funding for Postdoctoral Researchers is to advance the professional competence and independence of young promising researchers who have recently earned their doctorate (within 0– 4 years). Postdoctoral Researchers are encouraged to mobility and collaboration across national and sectoral borders. The three-year funding period may include one or more mobility periods as well as funding for returning to Finland. Funding can be applied for the Postdoctoral Researcher's own salary, personal research costs and international and domestic mobility (e.g. for travel and a grant for stay abroad). Funding is not granted for purposes of hiring a research team.

Applications for Postdoctoral Researcher's projects are evaluated on the basis of the merits of the applicant. However, the question concerning the applicant's merits in student supervision presented in the evaluation form (item 2.1) is in most cases irrelevant and need not be discussed.

**Academy Research Fellows (5– year funding).** The aim of a research post as Academy Research Fellow is to provide an opportunity for the most talented and experienced researchers to develop their skills of academic leadership and to establish themselves as independent researchers (3– 9 years after having taken the doctorate). At the same time, the research post as Academy Research Fellow gives the researchers an excellent opportunity to work independently on their research and to develop the research within their own field. Academy Research Fellows are encouraged to engage in international research collaboration and mobility across international and sectoral borders, for example, so that they work part of their term abroad.

Applicants for a research post as Academy Research Fellow may also be foreign researchers who already work in Finland or who will come to work within the Finnish scientific community.

The applicant is evaluated on the basis of her/his individual merits. Research posts are filled for a maximum of five years. Academy Research Fellows may be granted funding for research costs and for setting up a research team of their own. After having received a fellowship, Academy Research Fellows can apply funding for research costs.

*Development research grants*, as targeted Academy projects, provide funding for problem-oriented and multidisciplinary development research (research on developing countries). The grant scheme is co-funded by the Academy of Finland and the International Development Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The themes of the call, including eradicating extreme poverty, refer to international development policy objectives, specified in the call announcement. Funding can be granted for up to four years. Funding may also be granted for pilot studies and for the preparation of research projects together with researchers and research institutes based in developing countries. Research projects shall strive for active cooperation with researchers and research institutes in developing countries. In addition to the scientific and academic quality of the research plan, the Development research applications will also be reviewed in terms of their relevance to the themes of the call. The latter aspect, in particular, will be assessed in a preparatory meeting for the funding decisions of the Sub-committee for Development Research, where representatives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs participate.

## 5 Confidentiality

In Finland, the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999) applies, among other things, to application documents and expert review reports. According to the Act, research plans, abstracts, progress reports and review reports are confidential documents. Application documents should therefore be handled and stored with due care and confidentiality.

As a reviewer, you are not allowed to disclose any information concerning application documents or evaluations to outsiders, nor are you allowed to use this confidential information to your own benefit or anyone else's benefit or disadvantage. In addition, you may not reveal to outsiders that you are assessing the research plan of a particular researcher. If you are contacted by anyone who has questions about the application documents or review reports, please advise them to contact the Academy of Finland.

Once the evaluation has been completed, you are required to destroy all application documents and any copies made of them, or return them to the Academy. Confidentiality must also be maintained after the evaluation process has been completed.

Review reports are otherwise confidential documents, but applicants will have an access to the final review report on her/his application after the funding decisions have been made. **Applicants are entitled to know the names of the panel members, but the reviewers giving the preliminary reviews will not be identified.**

## 6 Conflict of interest

Reviewers are required to declare any personal interests according to the following criteria. You must disqualify yourself if you can in any way benefit from the approval or rejection of the proposal. You must also disqualify yourself in the following circumstances:

- You have close collaboration with the applicant (e.g. have co-authored and published an article with the applicant during the past three years, have been involved in the preparation of the application, or are involved in the publication or application of the results)
- You have been a superior, subordinate or instructor of the applicant during the past three years
- You are currently applying for the same post as the applicant

- You are currently applying for funding from the Academy from the same funding instrument
- The applicant is a close person to you. A close person is:
  - 1) your spouse (also *de facto*), child, grandchild, sibling, parent, grandparent or a person otherwise especially close to you (e.g. fiancé/e or a close friend), as well as their spouses (also *de facto*),
  - 2) a sibling of your parent or his/her spouse (also *de facto*), a child of your sibling, your previous spouse (also *de facto*),
  - 3) a child, grandchild, sibling, parent or grandparent of your spouse as well as their spouses (also *de facto*), a child of a sibling of your spouse,
  - 4) or a half-relative comparable to the above mentioned.

You are also disqualified if your impartiality may otherwise be endangered, or if you feel that you have a conflict of interest and are therefore disqualified to review the application.

If you identify any conflicts of interest, please notify the Academy as soon as possible.

### **7 Declaration for the reviewer to accept**

Please acknowledge, that accepting the task as a reviewer you guarantee not to disclose the information you get as reviewer and not to use it for anybody's benefit or disadvantage as it is stipulated in paragraph 5, "Confidentiality". Further, you affirm that if you have a conflict of interest in one or more proposals you will immediately inform the Academy and even the other panel members of it.

### **8 The Academy's online services**

For more information on how to use the Academy's online services, please see the document "For Application Reviewers Using the Online Services".