



INSTRUCTIONS FOR EVALUATING RESEARCH PROPOSALS – PANELS

Contents

- 1 Role of experts and the Research Council**
- 2 Expert panel meeting**
- 3 Evaluation**
- 4 Different funding instruments**
- 5 Confidentiality**
- 6 Conflict of interest**
- 7 Declaration**
- 8 Evaluation using the online services**

1 Role of experts and the Research Council

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 the innovativeness of the submitted research proposals. In most cases the review is finalised in expert panel meetings. After receiving the evaluations, the Academy's Research Council members rank the proposals and make the 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.

2 Expert panel meeting

The expert panel consists of esteemed researchers in the field. **The panel members have access to all applications assigned to the panel**, barring conflicts of interest (see below). Each proposal is assigned to at least two panel members who are asked to prepare preliminary evaluation statements. In some cases, a proposal 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. All preliminary evaluation statements are made available to the panel members before the meeting or at the meeting. The panel shall review all the applications assigned to it and prepare one joint evaluation statement for each proposal, based on the discussions and the preliminary evaluations. If required, Academy staff will assist the panel in preparing the final evaluation statements.

3 Evaluation

For evaluation, please use the online services available on our website (www.aka.fi/reviewers > Electronic services), see paragraph 8: "Evaluation 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 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 the research environment (rating 1–6)

- 2.1 Competence and expertise of the applicant/research team (sub-rating 1–6)
- 2.2 Description and significance of research collaborations (sub-rating 1–6)
- 2.3 Research environment (sub-rating 1–6)
- 2.4 In case of a research consortium, significance of the consortium for the attainment of the research objectives (to be answered if relevant; no numerical rating)

In case you are evaluating **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 Council in its decision-making. After funding decisions, the evaluation is sent to the applicant. The evaluations 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 proposal 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. You are encouraged to use the whole scale.

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

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

4 = very good proposal, which contains minor elements that could be improved

3 = good proposal, which contains some elements that can be improved

2 = satisfactory proposal, in need of substantial modification or improvement

1 = weak proposal, with severe flaws that are intrinsic to the proposed project

4 Different funding instruments

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

General research grants, the main form of Academy funding, aim at promoting the diversity and regeneration of research. The aim is to attain internationally as high a scientific standard of research as possible and to strengthen the creativity and impact of research.

Funding may be used for hiring scientific staff as well as for supplies, minor equipment, travel and overheads. Salaries may be granted for recruiting postdoctoral researchers and PhD students in research projects. The Academy of Finland may allocate funding for salary expenses of the responsible leader of a research project for a maximum of one year, but only for special reasons, for example if she/he returns from

abroad. Grants may also be allocated for researcher training abroad or for inviting a foreign researcher to work in a Finnish team for a maximum of one year.

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.

General research grants and research programme projects may also be applied for by a **consortium of several research projects**. A consortium has a common research plan submitted by a consortium leader, but all responsible leaders of the projects within the consortium submit their own curricula vitae and lists of publications, as well as other relevant appendices. **Please write only one evaluation statement of a research consortium application.** In this evaluation statement, the joint research plan and the competence of **all** responsible leaders should be discussed, as well as added value of the consortium for the attainment of the objectives of the whole project.

Postdoctoral researcher's projects aim at advancing the professional competence and independence of young researchers who have recently earned their doctorate. In addition to carrying out research according to the proposed research plan, the Academy recommends that postdoctoral researchers supervise Master's and PhD students. The most promising applicants may, if they have applied for it, be granted funding in addition to their own salary to start a small team of their own. However, only a few such grants are available.

Applications for postdoctoral researcher's projects are evaluated on the basis of the merits of the applicant. However, the detailed 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 Fellowships may be granted to talented researchers after a postdoctoral period, but before the applicant has a full professorship. Very successful publishing and other scientific work are required. The post is intended for independent scientific work in accordance with the proposed research plan. The duties of Academy Research Fellows also include teaching and supervision of theses and dissertations.

The applicant is evaluated on the basis of her/his individual merits. Posts are filled for a maximum of five years. Academy Research Fellow may be granted funding for research costs and for setting up a research team of her/his own.

Funding for senior scientists is intended for researchers with the qualifications of a full professor for full-time research work and supervision of PhD students in Finland and abroad. The funding is generally granted for research costs and the researcher's own salary from six months to an academic year.

5 Confidentiality

In Finland, the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999) applies, among other things, to application documents and expert evaluation statements. According to the Act, research plans, abstracts, progress reports and evaluation statements 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 evaluation statements, 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.

Evaluation statements are otherwise confidential documents, but applicants will receive the final evaluation statement for her/his proposal after the funding decisions have been made. Applicants are entitled to know the names of the panel members, but the reviewers giving the pre-evaluation statement 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 evaluate the application.

If you are unable to act as a reviewer, please notify the Academy of it 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 Evaluation using the online services

The Academy of Finland online services is a system created to serve a number of people: those who are applying for or have received Academy funding; staff at the Academy's Administration Office; Research Council members; and experts reviewing applications. Each user has his/her own user name, password and user-profile. If you have forgotten either of them, please click the "*User identification here*" button on the login page of the service (<https://lauri.aka.fi/akatemia/> > In English), and your user name and password will be retrieved and sent to you automatically.

Reviews are made using the Academy's online services (log in at www.aka.fi/reviewers > Electronic services). After login, you will see a screen with applications for you to review.

Please note the buttons "*To the opening page*", which takes you back to the opening page, and "*Personalia*", where you can change your password.

The link on the left takes you to the application and the one on the right opens the statement section. Clicking the application link opens the summary page of the application. In the top right corner of the page you find a pdf icon (Open form), which opens the entire application including appendices, in pdf. You may also read applications by clicking the "*Go*" button on the summary page, which will take you to the appendices (if necessary, scroll down on the page to see the "*Go*" button). Appendices can be read one by one by selecting the underlined file name, after which the "*Open*" button shows the contents in Acrobat Reader. Exit the appendix by closing Acrobat Reader and the possible blank page behind it.

To draft statements, go back to the opening page and select the corresponding link to the right to open the statement form. Statements are filled in one screen at a time; enter your comments in the field and, if necessary, give a numerical evaluation. Click "*Save and next*" or "*Save and previous*" in order to save the text you entered in the field. The pdf link in the top right corner (Open form) takes you to the statement summary. The summary is updated automatically as you go through the statement pages. The last screen is where you submit your statement. You may submit it straight away or go back via the main page to fill in other statements. When you are ready to submit your statement, do so by clicking the "*Submit statement*" button. After this you may no longer change your statement, but you can browse it by clicking on "*Evaluations on my responsibility*" on the opening page.

You will be able to see all applications assigned to the panel by clicking the "*Applications on my responsibility*" button, and via the "*Evaluations on my responsibility*" button you will also be able to see the summarised draft statements submitted for those applications, after all panel members have given their pre-statements.