ask & apply

SUOMEN AKATEMIA
FINLANDS AKADEMI
ACADEMY OF FINLAND

Tips for first-timers 2020

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Academy of Finland

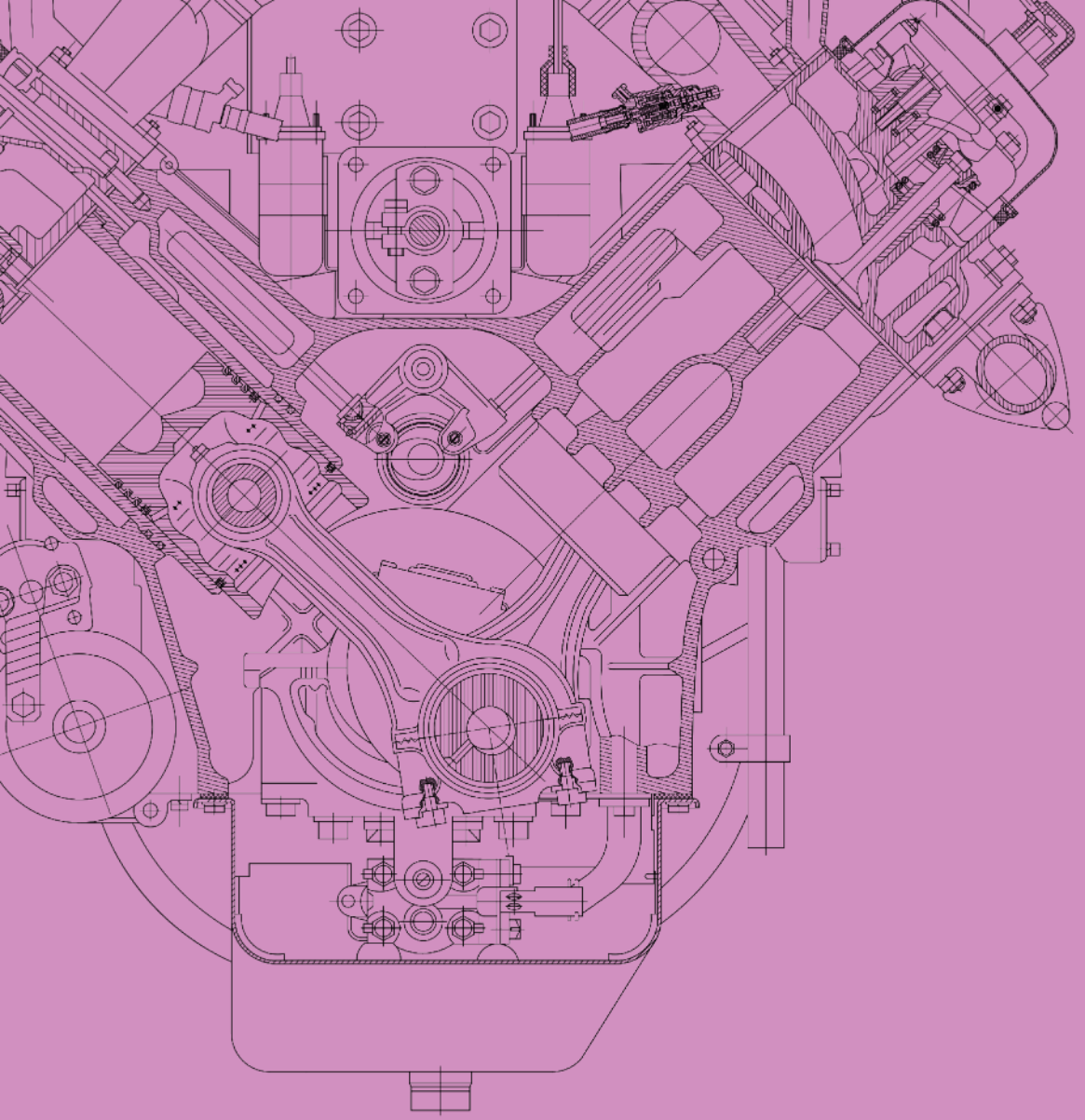
Funding opportunities

For researchers

Individuals	Groups	Thematic funding
Academy Professor Academy Research Fellow Postdoctoral Researcher Clinical Researcher Researcher mobility	Academy Project Centre of Excellence	Academy Programme Targeted Academy Project Strategic research funding

For research environments

Research infrastructure
University research profiling
Flagship programme



Do I fit with the aims of the funding instrument?

Funding instruments

Postdoctoral researchers (3-year funding)

- Max 4 years since doctorate
- Change of research environment & international mobility
- Carry out their own research plan, supervise thesis writers
- Support the most promising researchers **in gaining competence for demanding** research or expert positions

➢ Means: not to continue business as usual at supervisor's lab

- *Have established effective national or international collaborative networks. In the review of applications,* ***particular attention will be paid to the international dimension of the research plan.***
- *Are* ***encouraged to engage in international mobility and collaboration.***

➢ Means: If you want to be competitive, take the mobility plan seriously

Other funding instruments in this call

Academy research fellow (5-year funding)

- 3-9 years since doctorate
- Change of research environment & international mobility
- High scientific quality, extensive research networks, chance to develop skills of academic leadership **and to establish themselves as independent** researchers

Academy Projects (4-year funding)

- **Research teams**, PI's own salary should mostly be covered by the site of research
- The Academy Project funding scheme is designed to promote the quality and diversity of research, scientific impact and impact beyond academia as well as science self-renewal.

Clinical researcher (4-year funding)

- Part-time research by physicians and other researchers engaged in clinical practice.
- The aim is to promote clinical research careers in cooperation with, for example, university hospitals, and to **encourage medical doctors and other researchers** working in clinical practice to engage in research alongside clinical practice.
- The funding is granted for part-time salary costs (20–50% of working hours) and for research costs.

MOBILITY

1. Mobility requirement
and
2. Mobility plan

1. Mobility required to be eligible

Academy research fellows & Postdoctoral researchers

- Mobility is of particular importance to early-career researchers in improving the quality of their research and supporting their career development.

- Apply for funding
  - for a post in a research environment **other** than the one in which you worked while completing your doctoral thesis

    OR

  - in the same research environment, provided that you have **at least six months** of work experience from some other organisation after PhD completion.

- **Real mobility** benefits your career development

COVID-19 –
Exception to the mobility requirement

- *“In the September 2020 call, we will take into account that the COVID-19 pandemic **may have interrupted or cancelled a mobility period**. If you have been unable to meet the mobility requirement due to COVID-19 (e.g. the foreign organisation has not been able to commit to acting as host), you must describe the reasons and be able to provide proof.”*

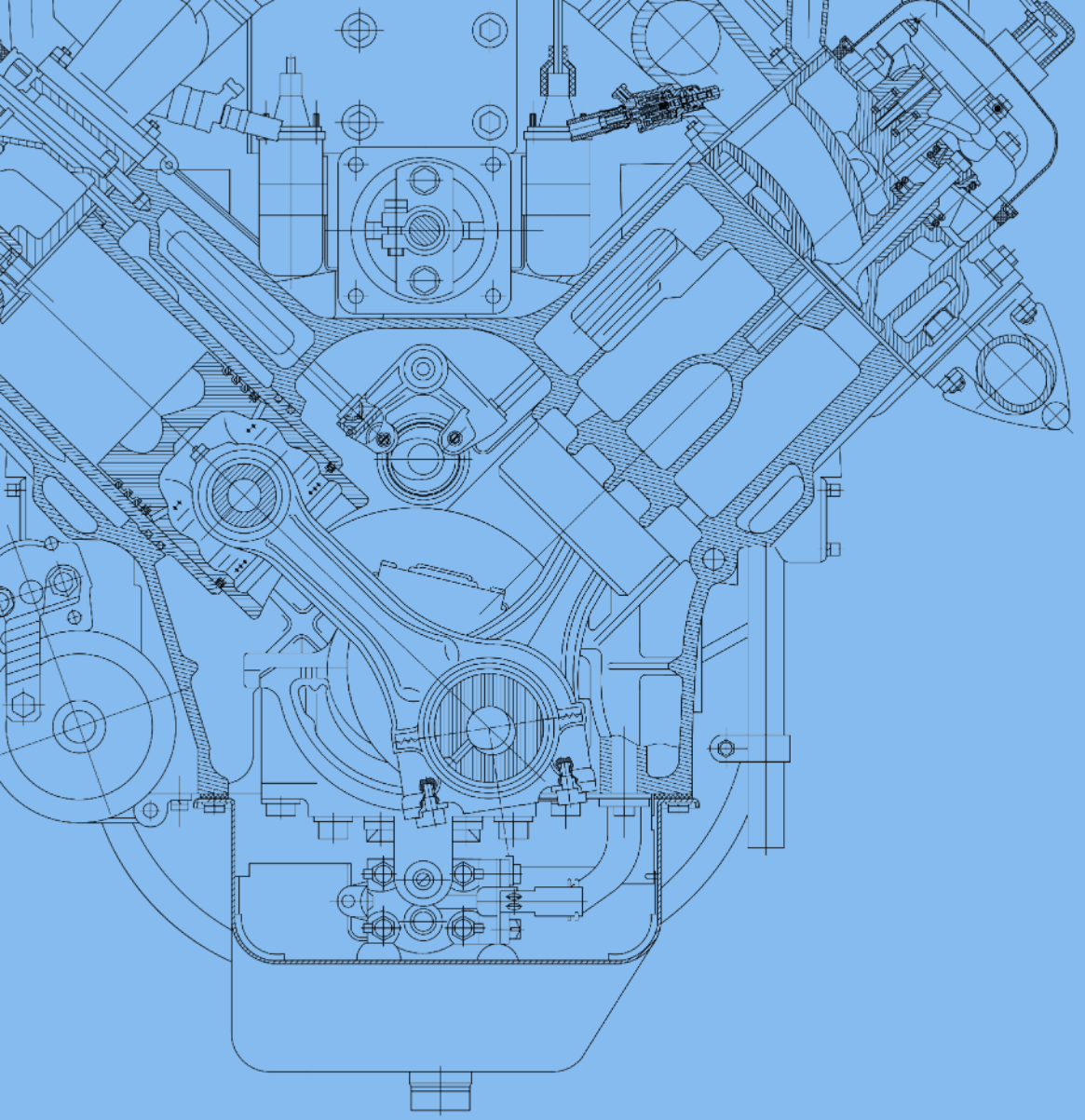
2. Take the mobility plan seriously

- Choose the best labs for mobility to increase your **independence, competitiveness and networks**, and to make the best out of this opportunity to learn new methods, skills, broaden networks etc.
- Read the Research councils' 'Funding criteria and policies', e.g.:

  - *A good objective is to have at least six months of justified, international mobility. The Research Council is also keen to emphasize the **significance of international mobility for later career advancement**.*

  - *The Research Council stresses the importance of mobility, especially international mobility, already at the postdoctoral stage. The applicant's **mobility plan should support the implementation** of the research plan. The Postdoctoral Researcher term is designed to advance the researcher's professional competence as a researcher.*

  - *Applicant's mobility and versatile collaborative networks in support of increased independence, especially the quality of the applicant's planned mobility and collaboration as well as the **added value for the proposed research plan** and the applicant's research career are being evaluated.*



Things to consider when writing your application

The structure of the research plan – ALL PARTS ARE IMPORTANT!

1. Aim and objectives	• Significance of the research project • Research questions & hypotheses • Expected results & impact
2. Implementation	• Work plan & schedule • Data & methods • Risk assessment
3. Research team and collaborators	• Merits & justifications
4. Responsible science	• Research ethics • Open science • Equality
5. Societal effects and impact	• Impact beyond academia • Sustainable development

The ”critical” parts

1. Aim and objectives	• Significance of the research project • Research questions & hypotheses • Expected results & impact
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Match your methods and aims

- Focused methodological plan directly tied to your specific aims

- Enough details on your plans and how to do this in practice

→ **Implementation!**

Write your research plan in accordance with the review form

1. Quality of research described in the plan

1.1 Scientific quality, novelty and innovativeness of the research Sub-rating (1–6)

Significance of the project; Objectives and hypothesis; Ambitiousness and state of the art of the objectives (possible novel concepts and approaches or development across disciplines); Scientific impact of the research; Potential for breakthroughs or exceptionally significant outcomes; etc.

→ Don’t leave it for the reviewer to figure it out and ”read between the lines”!
→ Write it clearly within your research plan!

Show your enthusiasm

- Your excitement towards your research questions and researcher career should be seen from your application
  - Choice of research visits
  - Knowledge of recent literature
  - Novel ideas, ’out of the box’ –thinking
  - Career development (CV)

Getting your message across

With so many applications, how do you make yours **stand out from the crowd**?

- Make it clear and understandable.
- 3 main points:

  Scientific excellence, scientific excellence and scientific excellence!

- Questions you should answer:
  - **Why this project?** What are the results? What are the impacts?
  - **Why now?** Why is the project important?
  - **Why me?** And why this research team?
  - **How much?**

- THE ABSTRACT → Think of it as your sales pitch.

Source: Professor Tuija Pulkkinen: "How to get your message across to the research council?"

Most common critique from evaluators?

Methods are often poorly explained

→ Go down to details and include proper risk analysis

“A number of applications were lacking important methodological details: therefore potentially good projects were being scored as lower quality.”

Be ambitious, but don’t overdo it

”As presented, the publication strategy is annoyingly too ambitious, and reflects a blunt underestimation of the difficulties that can be encountered in the course of the project”

Do something new

“The project does not go beyond the already defined scopes and networks of the hosting laboratory”

Layout, spelling & proper English

Put yourself in the shoes of the reviewer: make it understandable, enable skimming

“The better use of figures and tables would make the proposal more illustrative and improve the general readability.”

“At the end I am left with the feeling this was hastily written proposal.”

TIPS:

- ✓Describe how your project adds up to the current knowledge on the research field
- ✓Write more detailed and focused research plan
- ✓Give good description of the rationale for the project
- ✓Show how this project will help you to advance your academic career
- ✓Show clear aim to gain independent position
- ✓Take the mobility plan seriously → Choose best labs for mobility

GET HELP!

Research is teamwork, writing applications should also be

Collaborators listed in your application, but also:

- Senior scientist(s)
- Peer(s)
- Someone who has received the funding
- Research Services (e.g. budgeting)
- Science advisers and ’Helpdesk’ at Academy of Finland

Seek external reviews prior to submission, ideally both a specialist and a generalist

✓ Checklist:

TIP: see **A–Z index of application guidelines**

ask& apply

✓ Read the call text carefully > Apply for funding http://www.aka.fi/en/funding/apply-for-funding/

- ➢ Choose the right funding opportunity → What are the objectives?
- ➢ Read all guidelines and conditions

✓ Follow the right structure

- ➢ Curriculum vitae (CV) and Publication list
- ➢ The mobility plan is a part of your application
- ➢ The abstract is a concise scientific account of your research ≠ The public description of your project
- ➢ Write clearly, focus on describing your methods and implementation

✓ Familiarise yourself with the review questions and other guidelines for reviewers

✓ Know the (research policy) factors that influence the research council's decision

✓ START YOUR APPLICATION NOW: SIGN UP, UPDATE YOUR PERSONAL DETAILS (My account)
→ www.aka.fi/en > Go to the online services

✓ Send us your questions (you will find our contact information in the call text)

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