ACADEMY OF FINLAND

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Instructions for reviewing funding applications – individual reviewers

April Call 2020

Contents

1 Role of experts and the Academy of Finland

The Academy of Finland funds cutting-edge and innovative research aiming at significant scientific breakthroughs. Our funding is based on open competition and independent peer review. We grant funding to the best researchers and research teams as well as to the most promising junior researchers through several funding instruments (see Appendix 1). Experts are invited to review the scientific excellence of the submitted funding applications. In most cases, the applications are reviewed in expert panels. However, external reviewers may be used to support the panel review or as independent reviewers.

After receiving the reviews, decision-making bodies (research councils or subcommittees) make the final funding decisions. The decisions are based on a peer review of scientific quality (and in a case of panel review, the panel ranking), but factors related to science policy may also influence the decisions. Examples of such factors are the promotion of equal opportunities for all genders, the advancement of junior researchers' careers, and impact beyond academia.

2 Review

Reviewing funding applications

Written reviews: Evaluative comments are particularly valuable to the decision-making bodies. After the funding decisions have been made, the applicants get access to the review report(s) on their own application. The review also provides the applicant with important feedback. Reviewers should therefore:

- write evaluative rather than descriptive comments (avoid copying text from the application directly)
- write comments under each sub-item

- write coherent comments in the passive voice. In case you are writing an external review to support the panel review, your text may be used as such in the panel review report.

Numerical evaluation: The consistency between the numerical rating and the written comments is particularly important. The numerical evaluation of the sub-items and final rating is made with a rating scale ranging from 1 (poor) to 6 (outstanding).

6 (outstanding)	Demonstrates exceptional novelty and innovation. Has potential to substantially advance science at global level. Is a high-gain project that may include risks.
5 (excellent)	Is extremely good in international comparison – contains no significant elements to be improved.
4 (very good)	Is in general sound but contains a few elements that could be improved.
3 (good)	Is in general sound but contains important elements that should be improved.
2 (fair)	Contains flaws. Is in need of substantial modification or improvement.
1 (poor)	Contains severe flaws that are intrinsic to the proposed project or the application.

Review criteria

The main criteria in the review are:

1) the quality of the research plan
2) the competence of the applicant(s)
3) the project's relevance to the call (in thematic funding).

However, the review forms for different funding instruments may have minor differences in review criteria. At all levels of the review process, please pay close attention to potential breakthrough research.

The funding-instrument-specific review criteria and review instructions are presented in Appendix 1. The same instructions can also be found in the Academy's online services.

How to review applications in the Academy's online services

Please use the Academy of Finland's online services to review applications. Review reports are completed in the online services. You can access the items of the research plan directly from the corresponding review form questions. However, we do expect you to read the full application. You can find the review instructions and all our review forms under Guides for reviewers on our website.

3 Confidentiality and ethics

According to the Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities, research plans, abstracts, progress reports and reviews are confidential documents. Application documents should therefore be handled and stored with due care and confidentiality.

The Academy of Finland is committed to following the guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity for responsible conduct of research. The guidelines also apply to reviewing funding applications, research programmes and scientific disciplines. All reviews must be handled confidentially, competently and impartially, based on the criteria set for the review process. Care must be taken to ensure that the

review complies with general stipulations about conflicts of interest. Prior notice must be if a reviewer has economic or other affiliations or significantly different schools of thought in relation to the applicant under review. This is a way to avoid conflicts of interest.

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

Reviewers are guilty of research misconduct if they misappropriate research ideas from applications. The quality of the review is not a research-ethical issue unless the review has been conducted carelessly, which may give an appearance of a review that deliberately either underrates or overrates the applicants under review.

Disclosing the contents of research plans to third parties or contacting applicants personally without explicit agreement to do so are also regarded as instances of inappropriate behaviour on the part of reviewers.

Once the review has been completed, you are required to destroy all application documents and any copies made of them, or to return them to the Academy. Confidentiality must also be maintained after the review process has been completed. Reviews are confidential documents, but applicants will have access to the panel review reports on their own application after the funding decisions have been made. The draft reviews and external draft reviews are also confidential documents unless otherwise stated in the applicable legislation or required by court order.

After the funding decisions have been made, the Academy will publish a list of names, current positions and institutions of all individual reviewers and panel members used in the call. In addition, the applicants will see the names of all panel members in the panel review report. If requested, the names of reviewers that have supplied the draft reviews will also be disclosed to the applicant (under the Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities).

4 Conflicts of interest

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

- You have collaborated with the applicant (e.g. you have co-authored and published an article or manuscript with the applicant in the past three years, 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 in the past three years.
- You are applying for the same post as the applicant.
- You are applying for funding from the Academy from the same funding instrument.
- The applicant is a close person to you. A close person is:
  a) your spouse (also de facto), child, grandchild, sibling, parent, grandparent or a person otherwise close to you (e.g. fiancé/e or a close friend), as well as their spouses (also de facto)
  b) a sibling of your parent or his/her spouse (also de facto), a child of your sibling, or your previous spouse (also de facto)

c) a child, grandchild, sibling, parent or grandparent of your spouse as well as their spouses (also de facto), or a child of a sibling of your spouse
d) or a half-relative comparable to the above-mentioned persons.

You are also disqualified if your impartiality may be endangered in any other way, 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 us as soon as possible.

5 Reviewer's declaration

Please acknowledge that by accepting the task of a reviewer you guarantee not to disclose the information you receive and not to use it for anybody's benefit or disadvantage as stated in section 4 above (Confidentiality and ethics). Further, you affirm that you will immediately notify the Academy if you have a conflict of interest in one or more applications.

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Appendix 1:
Review forms and instructions for funding instruments (April 2020 call)

1. Academy Programme Health from Science (TERVA)
2. ICT 2023 targeted call
3. Antarctic research targeted call