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INSTRUCTIONS FOR REVIEWING FUNDING APPLICATIONS – PANELS

September Call 2019

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APPENDIX 1: FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

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. The Academy grants 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 and rank the reviewed applications. In most cases, the reviews are finalised in expert panel meetings.

After receiving the panel review reports, decision-making bodies (research councils or subcommittees) make the final funding decisions. The decisions are based on a peer review of scientific quality and 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 EXPERT PANEL MEETING

Before the meeting takes place, each application is assigned to at least two panel members who then prepare draft reviews. All draft review reports will be made available to the panel members before the meeting. In some cases, an application may be reviewed by an expert outside the panel to provide additional knowledge pertaining to a particular field through an external draft review.

The panel of experts consists of esteemed, mostly international researchers in the field. At the meeting, the panel will review all applications assigned to it and rank them. The panel prepares one joint panel review report on each application based on the discussions and the draft reviews. Academy staff will assist the panel



in preparing the panel review reports. The panel members have access to all applications assigned to the panel, barring conflicts of interest (see below).

3 REVIEW AND RANKING

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 panel review report 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 that can be used, if agreed, as such in the panel review report.

NUMERICAL EVALUATION: The consistency between the numerical rating and the written comments is particularly important. Please rate the application, both the sub-items and the overall rating, using this scale:

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

Review criteria

There are two main criteria in the review, (1) quality of the research plan, and (2) competence of the applicant(s). However, the review forms for different funding instruments may have minor differences in review criteria. At all levels of the review process, you are advised to pay attention to potential breakthrough research.

The main criteria are divided into sub-criteria as follows:

1 Quality of research described in the plan

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

- See item 1 *Aim and objectives* in the research plan.

Implementation of the research plan (rating 1–6)

- See item 2 *Implementation* in the research plan.



Research consortium (application submitted by several PIs) (no numerical rating)

- *In case you are reviewing consortium applications (in Academy Project funding, Academy Programme funding, Targeted Academy Project funding or Joint Projects), there is a sub-review criterion concerning the added value of the consortium. A consortium is a fixed-term body of subprojects and a collaboration of research projects that work at different sites or institutions under a joint research plan that is implemented in systematic collaboration. A consortium application is reviewed as a single research plan.*
- See item 2.4 *Added value of consortium* in the research plan.

Responsible science (no numerical rating)

- See item 4 *Responsible science* in the research plan.
- See also attached Data management plan.
- *Please note, the Academy of Finland is committed to research integrity for responsible conduct of research¹ and promoting the principles and practice of open science².*

2 Competence of the applicant(s), quality of research collaborations

Competence³ and expertise of the applicant(s) and the research team (rating 1–6)

- See item 3.1 *Project personnel and their relevant merits* in the research plan.
- See also attached CV(s) and list(s) of publications.
- *In case you are reviewing consortium applications, competence of all principal investigators should be reviewed.*
- *In case you are reviewing applications for, for example, Postdoctoral Researcher funding, the research team is not reviewed.*

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

- See item 3.2 *Collaborators and their key merits in terms of the project* in the research plan.
- See also Collaborators section in the application form.
- See also Mobility section in the application form.
- *In case you are reviewing applications for, for example, Postdoctoral Researcher funding or Academy Research Fellow funding, there is a separate sub-item concerning the researcher's mobility.*

¹ The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity; ALLEA, All European Academies, 2017 <https://www.allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ALLEA-European-Code-of-Conduct-for-Research-Integrity-2017.pdf>

² The Academy of Finland is committed to promoting the principles and practice of open science to improve the quality, responsibility, and social impact of science. The goal is to make all the outputs produced and used in research (research publications, data, methods) and their metadata widely available for reuse. The principles of open science must be pursued with due attention to good scientific practice and law. Also, the degrees of data openness may justifiably vary, ranging from fully open to strictly confidential.

³ The Academy of Finland is committed to promote DORA recommendations and not to use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an individual scientist's contributions. DORA - San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment <https://sfedora.org/read/>

3 Project's relevance (if applicable)

Project's relevance to the programme/call

(rating 1–6)

- *In case you are reviewing applications for Academy Programme funding, Targeted Academy Project funding or Joint Projects, there is an item concerning the project's relevance to the programme or call.*
- See all sections of the research plan and special item 1.4 Special objective of call in the research plan.

4 Overall assessment and rating

Main strengths and weaknesses of the project, additional comments and suggestions

(no numerical rating)

- *Please give an overall assessment for the application including lists of strengths and weaknesses as well as any additional comments. It is important to comment on both the strengths and the weaknesses of the application.*
- *You are also encouraged to comment on the societal effects and impact, including principles of sustainable development, see item 5 in research plan. However, these should not affect the scientific review/rating or ranking of the application. Instead, they will be considered as an additional factor when the funding decisions are made.*

Overall rating

(rating 1–6)

- *The final rating should not be a mathematical average of the sub-ratings. For example, the application should not be penalised if it has a slight weakness in one evaluation item that is later strengthened in another item (e.g. lack of some expertise in a local team but compensated through international collaboration).*

How to review applications in the Academy's online services

To review applications, please use the online services available on the Academy's website. Both draft reviews and panel 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, you are expected to read the full application. You can find the review instructions and all our review forms for current calls at <http://www.aka.fi/en/review-and-funding-decisions/how-applications-are-reviewed/guides-for-reviewers/>.

Ranking applications in a panel meeting

After the panel has completed the review of the applications within a funding instrument during the panel meeting, it is also asked to rank the applications (or some of the applications) within each funding instrument. The applications are ranked based on the review criteria used and the instrument-specific objectives (see Appendix 1) – no additional criteria are used.



4 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ETHICS

In Finland, according to the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999), 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 the process of 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 is conducted in accordance with general stipulations about conflict of interest. It is required to give prior notice to ensure no conflicts of interest exist if a reviewer has economic or other affiliations or significantly different schools of thought in relation to the applicant under review.

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 report review 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 of Finland 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 giving the draft reviews will also be disclosed (Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities).

5 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 collaboration with the applicant (e.g. you have co-authored and published an article or manuscript with the applicant in the past three years; you have been involved in the preparation of the application; or you 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 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:
 - 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 the Academy as soon as possible.

6 DECLARATION FOR THE REVIEWER TO ACCEPT

Please acknowledge that by accepting the task of a reviewer you guarantee not to disclose the information you receive as reviewer 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.



APPENDIX 1: FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

FUNDING FOR RESEARCHERS

Postdoctoral Researchers (3-year funding)

The aim of the funding for research posts as Postdoctoral Researcher is to support the most promising researchers who have recently completed their doctoral degree in gaining competence for demanding researcher or expert positions.

Academy Research Fellows (5-year funding)

Academy Research Fellows work on research plans of high scientific quality. Academy Research Fellows have built extensive research networks and the funding allows them to develop their skills of academic leadership and to establish themselves as independent researchers. Funding is provided for five years.

Clinical researchers (4-year funding)

The Academy of Finland funds 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. The funding is granted for four years.

FUNDING FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS

Academy Projects (4-year funding)

The Academy Project funding scheme is designed to promote the quality and diversity of research, scientific impact and impact beyond academia as well as scientific renewal. The aim is to reach internationally as high a scientific standard as possible and to support scientific breakthroughs and top-tier international research collaboration.

Sport science research projects (3-year funding)

The Ministry of Education and Culture funds sport science research projects in the specified thematic areas with the primary goal of generating new information to promote sports and physical activity. The research should be of high scientific quality and have high applicability and relevance to policy-making. The Academy of Finland organizes the scientific review of the applications. The relevance to the themes and applicability will be evaluated by the Ministry.



Targeted Academy Projects (2–4-year funding)

A Targeted Academy Project is like a normal Academy Project but with predetermined targets for funding. The Academy Board or research councils may decide to direct funding to specific areas, considering objectives such as strengthening a particular discipline (e.g. as a result of a discipline or research field assessment) or promoting the internationalisation of research.

Joint projects (2–4-year funding)

Joint project funding is regarded as Targeted Academy Project funding that is targeted, for example, at international calls for joint projects with foreign funding agencies.

Academy Programmes (4-year funding)

An Academy Programme is a research programme funded by the Academy of Finland. It is a thematic, target-oriented and coordinated body of research projects designed to promote the renewal of scientific research and to produce cutting-edge research knowledge in a specific thematic area. A key goal is to generate scientific impact.