



Principles for RCF funding decisions

Adopted by RCF Board on 18 September 2025

Applied to calls for applications opened on or after 19 September 2025



Research Council of Finland

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1. Introduction

The funding granted by the Research Council of Finland (RCF) counts as government grants, which are awarded in accordance with the budget approved by Parliament. The general conditions and obstacles for granting government grants are laid down in the Finnish Act on Discretionary Government Grants (688/2001). The principles for RCF funding decisions is a set of guidelines issued by the RCF Board, setting out the specific conditions and other factors governing the RCF's funding decisions.

The RCF also grants funding to organisations within the central government, such as government research institutes, in which case the funding is not a government grant but a form of co-financing. The principles set out in this document also apply to co-funded decisions.

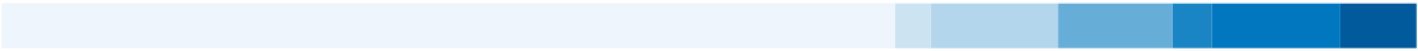
The provisions of this document also apply to funding decisions taken by the Strategic Research Council (SRC), unless the SRC has decided otherwise.

Funding may only be granted if the RCF has at its disposal the budget authority or appropriation, specified in the state budget, for the purpose in question. The RCF Board allocates the budget authority and appropriations granted to the RCF to the RCF's decision-making bodies. The Board's decision specifies the funding instrument or call for which the budget authority or appropriation is to be used and the extent to which the decision-making body may consider a more detailed use of the funding.

However, the SRC makes its funding decisions in accordance with the budget authority directly assigned to it in the state budget. The Administration Office of the RCF implements the RCF's funding calls in keeping with the Board's decision on the allocation of appropriations and as required by the Act on Discretionary Government Grants. All information relevant to the applicants regarding the decision-making process will be communicated in the call texts.

The RCF's decision-making bodies decide on all applications submitted in the same call for applications at the same time. For justified reasons, an individual application or a group of applications may be left to be decided at a different time.

The RCF's research funding decision is subject to the standard terms set by the RCF as a government grant authority for the use of research funding. The standard terms are decided by the RCF's Administration Office. The RCF may also set conditions specific to funding decisions, referred to as special conditions. The body making the funding decision decides the special conditions. By setting conditions for the



use of funding, the RCF aims to ensure that the objectives of the research funding are achieved.

2. Conditions for granting funding and exclusion criteria

RCF research funding may only be granted if the conditions described in this chapter are met and if there are no obstacles to the granting as described in this chapter. Otherwise, the application will be declared inadmissible or rejected.

2.1. Conditions for granting funding

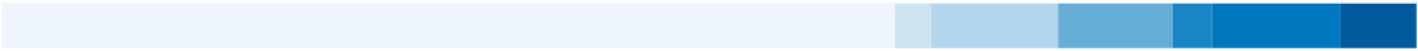
RCF research funding may only be granted if the following conditions are met:

- 1) The applicant is eligible to apply.
- 2) The recipient of the funding is an organisation located in Finland, and the applicant has strong ties to Finland.
- 3) In the application, the applicant has identified and assessed risks related to research security and, where necessary, presented an adequate risk management plan.
- 4) The application describes how good scientific practice will be followed in the implementation of the project.
- 5) The application describes how gender equality and nondiscrimination will be promoted in the implementation of the project.
- 6) The plans for open access to research outputs and for the responsible management of research data included in the application follow RCF guidelines.

2.2. Exclusion criteria

RCF research funding cannot be granted in the following cases:

- 1) The applicant has been found guilty of a serious violation of research integrity during the previous three years.
- 2) The applicant has not submitted a report on a completed or ongoing RCF-funded project in accordance with the guidelines and by the set deadline.
- 3) The applicant is a member of the RCF Board, a RCF scientific council or the Strategic Research Council (SRC), or has participated in the planning of the call to an extent likely to give them a comparative advantage over other applicants.

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- 4) The final beneficiary of the funding is located in Russia or Belarus, or cooperation with Russian or Belarusian researchers and research groups violates the instructions or regulations of the site of research or the authorities.

3. Review of applications

To support the granting of research funding, the RCF commissions an independent review of the applications. The purpose of the review is to provide the body making the funding decision with expert information based on which the decision-maker can compare applications on an equal footing and select for funding those applications that best meet the objectives of the call.

The application review carried out at the RCF follows the principles of peer review that are generally accepted in the international scientific community and widely applied in research funding contexts. The fundamental principles of the review are transparency, integrity, equity, competence and diversity. The RCF is committed to Finland's national Recommendation for the Responsible Evaluation of a Researcher.

In international joint calls, the review of applications may be carried out outside the RCF and in a manner that deviates from what is stated here, if so agreed with the international funding partner.

3.1. Organising the review

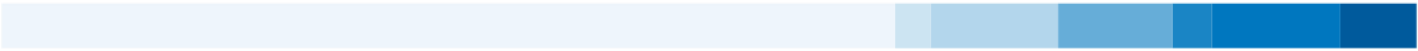
The review of applications is carried out as an external peer review, in which two or more independent experts are asked to provide reasoned reviews on the application. The review can be carried out either in the form of individual reviews or with review panels, where a panel review report is drawn up on the applications, or as a combination of these.

The enlisted reviewers are esteemed international researchers in their fields or otherwise regarded as peers in terms of the applications being reviewed. Experts working in Finland are only invited to participate as reviewers if the objectives of the call specifically require it. In exceptional cases, members of the RCF's decision-making bodies may also be used in the review.

3.2. Review factors

The subject of the review is the application submitted to the call in question. The following factors are considered in the review:

- 1) quality, innovativeness, novelty and impact of the plan

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- 2) feasibility of the application, including track record of applicant and research team as well as equality and nondiscrimination aspects related to the team's composition
 - 3) quality of research environments and networks described in the application.

Reviewers or the review panel may also be asked to rank the applications under review in order of merit.

The RCF Administration Office decides the review criteria related to the review factors on a case-by-case basis based on the objectives of the funding. The review factors and criteria as well as the scale used to describe them are published with the call texts.

4. Other factors considered in funding decisions

The body making the funding decisions takes into account the entirety of applications to be decided on in the call in relation to the objectives of the call. The RCF's funding promotes scientific research in a multidisciplinary manner, and the RCF's decision-making also aims to achieve the following objectives:

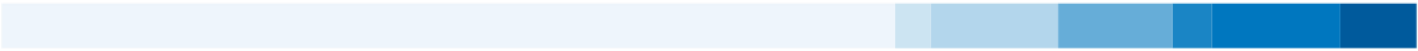
- 1) dismantling of gendered constructs in research and the scientific community
- 2) promoting diversity in research and the scientific community
- 3) supporting sustainable development.

In terms of applications of equal merit, priority will be given to the application that better fulfils the objectives listed above.

With regard to funding calls falling within its remit, a decision-making body may decide to take into account, in addition to the above, other factors that it considers support the RCF's strategy and serve the objectives set for the funding in question (see chapter 5). However, the above-mentioned objectives shall always take precedence over call-specific factors decided by the body. The factors to be taken into account in funding decisions, as decided by the body in question on a case-by-case basis for each call, and their significance in decision-making are specified in the call texts.

5. Objectives of RCF research funding

The task of the Research Council of Finland is to foster scientific research and its utilisation through funding (Act on the Research Council of Finland, section 2). The RCF has various funding instruments with which it grants funding. A funding instrument (also



referred to as funding scheme, funding opportunity) is a tool with which the RCF channels research funding towards a specific goal. All RCF calls offer funding under a specific funding instrument.

The factors that distinguish different funding instruments are the objective and target group of the funding. The purposes for which the funding may be used also differ between the various instruments. The objective and target group of a given funding instrument are based on the RCF's tasks and strategy. In addition, they may be based on provisions laid down in the state budget and on the provisions of the performance agreement concluded with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

The funding instruments described here may be specified in the decision on the allocation of budget authority. The RCF's Administration Office may decide on call-specific details in matters that are not of fundamental importance. The funding instrument and the call specifications are described in detail in the call text.

5.1. RCF funding categories

The RCF divides its funding portfolio into three categories, each with its own impact objectives.

'Spark' is the category with which the RCF supports long-term and innovative research. The objective is to ensure free competition between bold, researcher-driven research ideas and reinforce the variety and high quality of the scientific foundation of the Finnish research, development and innovation system.

'Forge' is the category with which the RCF provides funding for competence clusters and research environments. Its aim is to strengthen research infrastructures and Finland's most internationally competitive areas of scientific expertise and to increase their appeal as collaborative and operational research environments.

The third category, 'Shift', focuses on the utilisation and impact of research-based knowledge. The funding is allocated to purposes aligned with the RCF's thematic priorities or the state budget, as well as to international funding calls. The aim is to solve identified societal challenges and promote the versatile use of research results in order to increase economic and other societal impact.

Within these categories, funding can be granted under various funding instruments, the objectives and target groups of which are described in Table 1.

Funding instrument	Objective	Target group
Spark		
Academy Project Funding	Excellent scientific research whose results have international scientific impact	Experienced researcher who leads a research team
Academy Research Fellowship	Increasing competence, excellent, innovative and high-impact research	Talented researcher who obtained their doctorate 2-7 years ago
Academy Professorship	Particularly excellent scientific research whose results have extensive international scientific impact	Particularly accomplished researcher with a proven track record of international impact and a distinguished research team under their leadership
Forge		
Finnish Flagship	Wide-ranging economic and other societal impact based on particularly high-level scientific research	A competence cluster based on cooperation between organisations, with convincing track record of results and impact
Centre of Excellence in Research	Particularly excellent scientific research that increases capacity for scientific renewal and whose results have extensive impact	Particularly accomplished research team or consortium of research teams
Research infrastructure project	Boosting the impact and international competitiveness of research environments, increasing expertise and strengthening interaction between RDI actors	Host organisation of research infrastructure
Targeted research infrastructure project	The objective is defined in the decision on the allocation of budget authority	Host organisation of research infrastructure
Shift		
Targeted Academy Project Funding	The objective is defined in the decision on the allocation of budget authority	Experienced researcher who leads a research team
Funding to strengthen university research profiles	Developing Finland's RDI system by strengthening the research profiles of universities	University
Grants for mobility, work and costs	The objective is defined in the decision on the allocation of budget authority	Researcher