



Instructions for evaluating applications

**Competitive funding to strengthen university
research profiles (PROFI)**



Research Council of Finland

Table of Contents

1.	Aims of the funding instrument.....	3
2.	Review of applications.....	3
3.	A short guide to our online services	6
4.	Secrecy and integrity in the review process.....	7
5.	Conflicts of interest	8
6.	Reviewer’s declaration	9
7.	Responsible science	9
7.1.	Research ethics.....	9
7.2.	Equality and nondiscrimination	9
7.3.	Open science	9

1. Aims of the funding instrument

The purpose of the PROFI funding opportunity is to support and speed up the strategic profiling of Finnish universities in order to improve the quality of research. The funding is intended for measures that strengthen the research areas outlined in the universities' strategies. In the 2024 call (PROFI 8), the funding is fixed-term and may be granted to support research areas chosen by Finnish universities based on their strategy. The funding aims to promote these areas. In their applications, universities are asked to provide an overall picture of their plans for profiling and distribution of work, both from the university's perspective and in relation to other universities, if applicable. The funding is open to all scientific, scholarly and artistic disciplines.

Another aim is to contribute to intensifying strategic cooperation between Finnish universities and with universities of applied sciences, research institutes, hospital districts and other relevant actors, and to clarifying the responsibilities between these actors. The regional and thematic competitive clusters formed via such collaboration and distribution of work may also include actors from the private and nonprofit sectors. For more information, please see the [Call for applications](#).

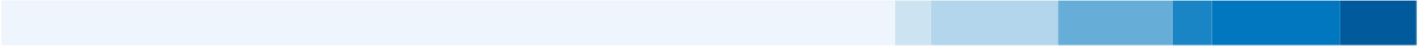
2. Review of applications

The applications submitted by universities will be reviewed by an international panel. Experts recruited to the panel must have extensive experience and understanding of the higher education field, research and the development of universities. The perspective of strategic development will be given prominence in the review. Key considerations will include the concreteness and viability of the action plans and the individual profiling measures proposed in each profiling area. Based on the panel's review, the decisions on funding will be made by the Research Council of Finland.

In addition to the applications submitted, the review panel has access to a **background material document**, which describes briefly the previous seven PROFI calls, the university reform in Finland and the model for government core funding to universities. Further, the document includes data on the distribution of professors between disciplines by university, bibliometric data on the performance of Finland and Finnish universities in the 2000s, and links to the following documents: Long-term plan for research infrastructures 2030 and National Roadmap for Research, Development and Innovation.

The panel meeting and interviews will be organised as online meetings.

The panel members are asked to familiarise themselves with the applications and background material. Each application will be assigned to two panel members, who are asked to write individual review reports before the panel meeting (3-5 draft reviews/panel member). Please note that the individual review reports will be given to the applicants as is, including the names of the reviewers.



The panel members are also asked to read a few other applications in order to discuss them during the meeting.

The panel will interview the management of each university. After the interviews, the panel members will finalise the panel's summary assessments, ratings and rankings during the panel meeting.

The following review questions will be applied in reviewing applications submitted to this call:

Review questions (1-5 for each profiling area):

1. Justification for selection as strategic profiling area
 - How plausible are the arguments for the area being selected as a strategic profiling area?
2. Measures, resources, schedule, follow-up, risk management
 - How viable, feasible and plausible is the action plan with regard to the measures, schedule, resources, follow-up of implementation and impacts, and risk management?
3. Level of research
 - How viable, feasible and plausible is the plan to reach or to maintain the aspired international level of research and to renew research?
4. National and international collaboration
 - How viable are the arrangements for distribution of work and collaboration with other Finnish universities, Finnish research institutes, universities of applied sciences, hospital districts and other partners in the profiling area, including international collaboration? For example: complementarity, research-related added value, infrastructures and data sharing.
5. Societal impact
 - What is the relevance and significance of the measures with regard to promoting knowledge transfer, competence-based growth and other needs in society?
6. Summary assessment on the action plan as a whole
 - How justified and clear is the action plan as a whole in relation to the university's strategic profiling areas and themes? To what extent will the action plan strengthen the implementation of the

strategy? What is the university's overall commitment to the action plan?

7. Review panel's summary assessment (to be completed only at the panel meeting after interviews)
 - Summary of key strengths of proposed action plan with justifications
 - Summary of key weaknesses of proposed action plan with justifications
 - Other remarks (if any)
8. Overall rating

Please write the review based on the defined review questions. It is important to give feedback both on the university's action plan as a whole and on the proposed profiling measures individually in relation to the aspired level of research. Profiling areas can be:

- i) existing high-quality areas
- ii) emerging areas with potential to reach the top level
- iii) new areas with high potential.

In addition to your written comments, please give **two ratings**: 1) **a rating for each profiling area**, and 2) **an overall rating** for the application. The review panel will also rank the applications.

The review focuses both on the university's overall action plan and on how significant, concrete and realistic each profiling area and measure is. The review panel's summary assessment is based on the application, the individual reviews and the interview.

Rating for a profiling area:

6: The measures, schedule, resources, follow-up of implementation and impacts, and risk management plan are clearly very viable, feasible and plausible. The arrangements for distribution of work and collaboration have significant added value for the aspired level of research. The measures strongly promote knowledge transfer, competence-based growth and other needs in society.

5: The measures, schedule, resources, follow-up of implementation and impacts, and risk management plan are viable, feasible and plausible. The

arrangements for distribution of work and collaboration have added value for the aspired level of research. The measures promote knowledge transfer, competence-based growth and other needs in society.

4: Is in general sound but contains a few elements that could be improved.

3: Is in general sound but contains important elements that should be improved.

2: Is in need of substantial modification or improvement.

1: Has severe flaws in the plan.

Summary assessment rating:

6 Outstanding: The action plan includes viable, significant and very concrete profiling measures that clearly promote strategic profiling within the university and that contribute significantly to enhancing research quality in the Finnish research and innovation system.

5 Excellent: The action plan includes viable, significant and very concrete profiling measures that promote strategic profiling within the university and that contribute to enhancing research quality in the Finnish research and innovation system.

4 Good: The action plan includes viable and concrete profiling measures. The proposed profiling measures should have been more extensive to reach the target and to contribute to the Finnish research and innovation system.

3 Modest: The action plan includes moderate profiling measures. For instance, the profiling measures should have been more extensive or viable.

2 Weak: The action plan is not viable in its present form.

1 Unsatisfactory: The action plan is out of scope.

3. A short guide to our online services

Finding your review requests and all applications

- Go to the **Reviews** tab on the welcome screen (Desktop menu). You will find both your open (not submitted) and submitted reviews under the **Reviews** menu, on respective tabs.

- To read all applications, click on **Download ZIP file of all applications**. The application PDF files are saved in one compressed ZIP file.
- To read general documents for the panel members, click the link of the document on the file list.

Writing and editing the review

- Click on **Edit review** on your list of reviews to open the form with which you enter the review.
- Click on **View application** if you want to open the application to read, print or save it (can be saved as a PDF file). Click the **Save** button every now and then because the session will close automatically after 30 minutes of inactivity. After saving, you can safely **Log out** to enter the review later.

Submitting the review

- Click on the **Submit** button on the review.
- After submitting, you cannot edit the review unless requesting it from the Research Council's science adviser.
- Research Council of Finland staff will provide all the technical assistance for the panel during the online meeting. We will provide more details closer to the online panel meeting.

4. Secrecy and integrity in the review process

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

The Research Council of Finland is committed to following the [Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland \(PDF\)](#).

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 given 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. This also applies to entering this information in AI tools such as ChatGPT (see also the [European research integrity guidelines](#) on the use of AI tools in research or review). In addition,

you are not allowed to use secret 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 Research Council of Finland. Disclosing the contents of research plans to third parties or contacting applicants personally without explicit agreement to do so are 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. In addition, the Finnish Criminal Code provides for the punishability of breaches of the obligation to maintain the secrecy of a document kept secret under the Act on the Openness of Government Activities and breaches of the nondisclosure obligation and the prohibition of use.

Reviewers are guilty of research misconduct if they misappropriate information from applications. This also includes copying any part of an application. 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.

The composition of the panel and the positive funding decisions will be shown on the Research Council of Finland's website after the decisions have been made. Applications, review reports, ratings and rankings are made public on request.

Confidentiality must also be maintained after the review process has been completed.

5. Conflicts of interest

Reviewers are required to declare any personal interests according to the following criteria:

- You must disqualify yourself if you or a close person to you (e.g. a family member, relative or a close friend) can in any way benefit or suffer specific loss from the approval or rejection of the proposal.
- You must also disqualify yourself if you are or a close person to you is a member of a governing organ of an applicant or in other position that might compromise your impartiality.
- You are also disqualified to review the application if your impartiality may otherwise be endangered, or if you feel that you have a conflict of interest.

If you identify any conflicts of interest, please notify us as soon as possible.

6. 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. Further, you affirm that you will immediately notify the Research Council if you have a conflict of interest in one or more applications.

7. Responsible science

7.1. Research ethics

The Research Council of Finland requires that the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity guidelines [Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland \(PDF\)](#) are followed in all research funded by the Research Council. We also require that researchers follow ALLEA's (All European Academies) [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity \(PDF\)](#) when engaging in international collaboration. The same guidelines also oblige researchers in their work abroad. Read more about [research ethics](#) on our website.

7.2. Equality and nondiscrimination

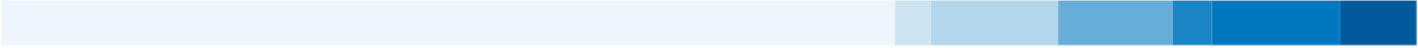
The Research Council of Finland promotes equality and nondiscrimination as part of responsible science. To secure responsible reviews and decision-making, we are, in accordance with our [Equality and Nondiscrimination Plan](#), committed to defining the means to support combining work and family life and the research careers of women in all funding opportunities.

We require that all research we have funded promotes gender equality and nondiscrimination. Our reviews and decision-making emphasise the importance of promoting equality and nondiscrimination either in the suggested project or in the wider society. Gender is not part of the information in the applications under review.

In the review of applications, we ask reviewers to pay attention to the unconscious bias that affects us all. Unconscious bias refers to a positive bias towards our 'ingroup' and a negative bias towards our 'outgroup'. The very act of realising hidden biases makes them less powerful. In review (especially in panels), it is easier to detect unconscious biases in others than in yourself. We ask you to be prepared to call out bias when you see it.

7.3. Open science

The Research Council of Finland is committed to promoting the principles and practices of open science to improve the quality, responsibility and societal impact of science. The goal is to make all outputs produced and used in research (research publications, data, methods and metadata) widely



available for reuse. The principles of open science must be pursued with due attention to good scientific practice and law. The degrees of data openness may justifiably vary, ranging from fully open to strictly confidential. Read more about the [our open science policy](#) on our website.