

RCF review principles

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In all research funding, the Research Council of Finland (RCF) is committed to following responsible procedures with regard to disqualification, secrecy and responsible science (equality and nondiscrimination, research ethics, open science, sustainable development and responsible researcher assessment). Compliance with good scientific practice, equality and nondiscrimination and open science is a prerequisite for funding. Applicants must describe these aspects in their research plan, and reviewers are expected to comment on their quality in the review reports.

1. Code of conduct for review

1.1 Responsible researcher evaluation

The RCF is committed to promoting fair, transparent and responsible researcher assessment. As part of this commitment, we have endorsed key international and national frameworks that guide our peer-review practices. We are a signatory of the [Agreement on reforming research assessment \(PDF\)](#) – an initiative developed by [CoARA](#), the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment – and an active member of the coalition. This agreement outlines four core commitments that we apply in our evaluation processes.

In addition, we follow [Finland's national recommendation on good practices in researcher evaluation \(PDF\)](#) and are a signatory of the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#). These principles collectively guide our peer-review processes and ensure that evaluations are conducted with integrity, equity and a focus on the quality and impact of research.

**Agreement on reforming research assessment - four core commitments:**

1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.
2. Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.
3. Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and the h-index.
4. Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment.

When reviewing the competence of the applicant, you are asked to consider the content and quality of publications, rather than their number or venue of publication, or the impact of the journals in which they were published. Use of journal-based metrics (e.g. Journal Impact Factor) as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles to assess an individual scientist's contributions is not allowed. Please note also that other citation metrics, such as the h-index, used in isolation do not describe the impact, importance or quality of publications and can potentially be misleading when applied to peer review.

Citation metrics are dependent on the citation practices of different research fields and are therefore not a reliable comparative measure in multidisciplinary panel review. Applicants are not allowed to include any journal-based metrics or other citation metrics in their application.

When assessing researchers' merits and their competence in delivering the proposed research, you are asked to consider the value and impact of all research outputs, not only publications. In many of our calls, applicants are asked to list the ten most relevant publications and ten other key outputs, with appropriate rationales. They may also be requested to provide a complete list of publications, depending on the call. The types of outputs vary between disciplines.

In applications for Academy Research Fellowships, you will find a CV and a dedicated section called 'Merits and increased competencies', which facilitates the review of the competence, expected achievements and potential of the applicant according to the objectives of the funding instrument.

You are also asked to be sensitive to legitimate delays in publication and personal factors or other types of leave, part-time work and disabilities that may have affected the applicant's record of outputs. Read more about [responsible researcher evaluation](#) on our website.

1.2 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.



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The RCF is committed to following [the Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland \(PDF\)](#). 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 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 the information in AI tools such as ChatGPT (see also the [European research integrity guidelines \(PDF\)](#) 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 or action plan of a particular applicant. Disclosing the contents of research or action 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. If you are contacted by anyone, including the applicant, who has questions about the application or reviews, please advise them to contact the RCF.

Reviewers are guilty of research misconduct if they misappropriate research ideas, results, observations or data 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 applicant under review.

After the funding decisions have been made, the RCF will publish on its website a list of panels and (with permission) the names of the panel members including their current positions and institutions as well as the names of all individual reviewers enlisted in the call. If requested, this information will be disclosed already after the panel meeting.

As a government agency, the RCF is subject to the Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities. This law dictates that the applicant has a right to obtain information concerning their application, including the individual reviews and the names of the reviewers. In addition, if the application is also reviewed in a panel, the names of all panel members will be disclosed in the review report.



Confidentiality must also be maintained after the review process has been completed. Application review involves secret documents, but applicants will have access to the review reports on their applications after the funding decisions have been made. An applicant shall not disclose to third parties secret information obtained based on party status and concerning other persons than the party themselves.

In calls where draft reviews are part of the process, the draft reviews and the names of reviewers who have supplied the draft reviews will also be disclosed to the applicant, if requested (under the Act on the Openness of Government Activities). The possible draft reviews are also secret documents unless otherwise stated in the applicable legislation or required by court order.

1.3 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, prepared a manuscript with the applicant in the past three years, or been involved in the preparation of the application).
- You are a superior, subordinate or instructor of the applicant.
- You are applying for the same post as the applicant.
- You are applying for funding from the RCF 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) 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.

2. 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 1.2 above (Secrecy and integrity in the review



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process). Further, you affirm that you will immediately notify the RCF if you have a conflict of interest in one or more applications.

3. Responsible science in research

3.1 Research ethics

The RCF requires that the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity's guidelines [Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland \(PDF\)](#) are followed in all RCF-funded research.

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.

Researchers applying for RCF funding have to describe the ethical aspects related to their research in their application. If the research project involves, for example, ethical questions related to the processing of personal data, the use of experimental animals or the use of dual products, the principal investigator must explain in sufficient detail in their application how these have been taken into account.

We will not process a funding application if the applicant has been found guilty of research misconduct in the three years preceding the year of the call. Read more about the [ethical questions](#) on our website.

3.2 Equality and nondiscrimination

RCF funding 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. Therefore, career breaks due to certain leaves (maternity, paternity, parental or childcare leave, or military or nonmilitary service, other special reasons, such as long-term illness) cannot be evaluated negatively in the evaluation process.

We require that all RCF-funded research promote gender equality and nondiscrimination. Applicants are required to describe in their application how gender equality and nondiscrimination are taken into account, both in the proposed project (e.g. objectives, methodology, analysis, dissemination) and in the composition of the research team. Our reviews and decision-making emphasise the importance of promoting equality and nondiscrimination both in research projects and in the wider society.

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'. For example, when you are assessing whether the research is groundbreaking and whether the applicant is competent enough to carry out the proposed project, pay special attention to the possible unconscious biases that



you might have and that could have an impact on your evaluation. 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.

3.3 Open science

The RCF 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 [our open science policy](#) on our website.

The RCF is a member of cOAlition S and uses Plan S principles and practices in its funding guidelines. In addition, we apply [the National Policy for Open Access to Scholarly Publications](#).

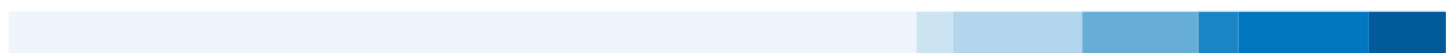
When reviewing publication plans, reviewers are asked to take note of our open access policy and value the applicants' efforts to publish in OA journals or use other alternatives that secure the immediate open access of articles. All peer-reviewed articles written in RCF-funded projects should be published with immediate open access. Applicants may use OA journals, platforms, repositories or journals that commit to full OA.

When reviewing applicants' preliminary presentations on data management and open access to research data, reviewers are asked to take note of the RCF's research data policy and value the applicants' efforts to open the research data collected during the research. Reviewers are also asked to support well justified arguments if the applicant states that no research data will be collected or gives understandable reasons for not opening the research data. The funded projects submit a full research data management plan after a positive funding decision.

3.4 Research security

An amendment to the Act on the Research Council of Finland, which entered into force on 1 July 2025, requires us to incorporate research security considerations into our funding processes. As a result, applicants must include a research security assessment as part of their application.

We do not expect a comprehensive risk assessment from every applicant. However, we do require that potential risks – such as dual-use technologies, threats to academic freedom, or issues related to data management – are identified and addressed appropriately in the appendix.





Research security is not a criterion in the review of applications. However, if reviewers identify any research security concerns that are not addressed in the appendix, they can notify RCF staff about them.

3.5 Sustainable development

The RCF is committed to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and has made its own commitment to Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development for 2022-2025. By this commitment, our aim is to raise awareness of the principles of sustainable development and to emphasise the importance of these principles in research funding and research work.

In their research or action plans, applicants are encouraged to describe how the project promotes one or more of the 17 SDGs, and how sustainability is taken into account in the project's implementation.

Although not a criterion in the review of applications, sustainable development is one of the science policy objectives that factors in when RCF funding decisions are made. Thus, we encourage reviewers to comment on how the project incorporates sustainable development.

Read more about [our commitment to sustainable development](#) on our website.

