

Instructions for reviewing funding applications - 2026 winter call

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1. Objectives of the Research Council of Finland and the funding schemes

The Research Council of Finland's (RCF) mission is to open up new avenues for excellent, responsible and high-impact research. Our objectives are to advance new scientific breakthroughs and solutions for the benefit of society; the capacity of research for renewal and reform; and better and higher-impact skills and competence. Our funding is based on open competition, independent peer review and responsible science. We grant funding to researchers and research teams as well as to the most promising early-career researchers through different funding instruments.

1.1. Academy Project Funding

The Academy Project funding scheme is designed to promote the quality of research, scientific impact and impact beyond academia as well as scientific renewal and diversity. The focus of the review should be on the scientific quality and implementation of the research plan. The aim is to reach internationally as high a scientific standard as possible and to support scientific breakthroughs and top-tier international research collaboration. The funding is applied for to employ a research team, and it may be applied for by individual research teams or consortia composed of two or more research teams. Read more in the [call text](#).

1.2. Academy Research Fellowship

The focus of the review should be on reviewing the research plan and the applicant's competence, based on qualitative indicators. The researcher's merits should be assessed through a wide range of outputs and research career roles and an ability to generate scientific renewal. The applicant should be a promising research talent who is on a rising career trajectory and has potential to advance to more demanding research positions. Throughout the review, the applicant's career stage should be taken into account, including possible career breaks. Read more in the [call text](#).

2. Role of experts and the RCF

Experts are invited to review the scientific excellence of the applications. The experts are esteemed, mostly international researchers in the field of the applications concerned. The review of applications follows a two-stage process. In the first stage, experts are asked to give at least two individual reviews on the application. If at least one expert has given an overall rating of 5 or 6, the application will proceed to be reviewed by a panel. The other applications will continue directly to decision-making. The funding decisions are made by the RCF's decision-making bodies.

2.1. Panel chair

Each panel is assigned a chair from among the panel members. The duties of the chair are to chair the panel meeting via an online platform (Teams), lead the discussion and ensure that all applications are reviewed in a responsible and fair manner. The chair also has duties as a panel member. After the panel meeting, the chair is expected to deliver a brief memorandum including feedback on the review process and the panel meeting.

2.2. Individual reviewers and panel members

Experts may act as individual reviewers and panel members. The duties of individual reviewers are to review and write review reports on the applications allocated to them. As a rule, individual reviewers also participate in the panel as members. All panel members are expected to actively participate in the panel meeting.

Applications will be assigned to at least two individual reviewers and/or possibly a reader in the panel review phase. The reader is asked to form an opinion of the application without writing a review. One of the reviewers will be a summariser in the panel meeting and will write the final panel's summary assessment for the application.

2.3. Panels

The RCF winter call has 40 review panels, which will review applications for Academy Project Funding and Academy Research Fellowships. The applicants submit their applications to a single panel using the [guidelines and panel descriptions](#) (link takes you to the RCF website). A panel may be split if there is a high number of applications addressed to it.

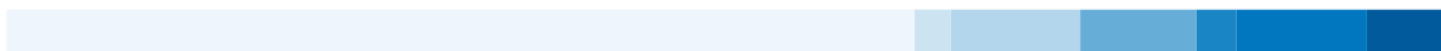
Panels consist of a chair, a possible vice chair and panel members representing the scope of the panel.

2.4. RCF officials

The RCF's officials invite the panel members and, if needed, additional external individual reviewers to support the panel, provide instructions on the review process and organise instructive webinars and pre-panel meetings when relevant. The officials also take care of the practical arrangements in the panel meeting and follow that the review process is carried out according to established RCF procedures.

2.5. Decision-making bodies

After receiving the review reports and panel rankings, the [scientific councils](#) (link takes you to the RCF website) make the final funding decisions. The decisions are based on the peer review and 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 early-career researchers' careers and impact beyond academia.



3. Review and ranking

3.1. Review criteria and rating scale

The main criteria in the review are:

- scientific quality, novelty and innovativeness of the research as well as its impact within the scientific community
- feasibility of the research plan and the quality of the research environment, including responsible science (research ethics, open science, equality and nondiscrimination, sustainable development)
- competence of applicant (especially for Academy Research Fellowships)
- human resources, expertise and collaborations including researcher mobility, and researcher training.

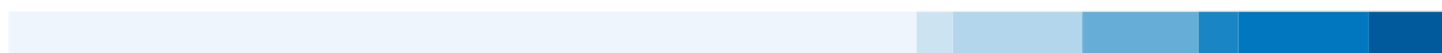
The review forms for the different funding instruments contain specified review criteria. The objectives of the instruments and the instrument-specific review criteria are presented in section 1 above and in the review forms.

Written reviews: Written reviews play a crucial role in aiding the decision-making bodies. In addition, they provide important feedback to applicants. Reviewers should therefore:

- write evaluative comments and give justifications using full sentences
- avoid descriptive comments and copying text directly from the application
- write comments and give subratings under each review item, taking into consideration the specific guidelines for each item (however, item 'Review panel's summary assessment' will be developed and finalised during the panel meeting)
- maintain coherence throughout their comments and give constructive feedback.

After the funding decisions have been made, the applicants will receive the individual reviews and the panel summary assessment including the names of the experts on their own applications.

Numerical rating: The consistency between the numerical rating and the written comments is particularly important. The rating scale ranges from 6 (outstanding) to 1 (insufficient). At all levels of the review process, please pay close attention to the potential for breakthrough research.



Rating scale	Description
6 (outstanding)	Demonstrates extremely high novelty and/or innovation; has potential to substantially advance science at global level; presents a high-gain plan that may include risks
5 (excellent)	Is very good in international comparison – contains no significant elements to be improved
4 (good)*	Is in general sound but contains some elements that should be improved
3 (fair)*	Is in general sound but contains important elements that should be improved
2 (poor)*	Contains flaws and needs substantial modification or improvement
1 (insufficient)*	Contains severe flaws that are intrinsic to the proposed project or the application

* Below threshold for panel discussion if all individual overall ratings are below 5.

3.2. Individual review

Each application is assigned to at least two individual reviewers. Reviewers write individual reviews, using specified sections in the review forms, and give subratings and overall ratings to the applications. Applications given an overall rating of 5 or 6 from at least one reviewer will continue to the panel review phase. The other applications will continue directly to decision-making. Therefore, the deadline for submitting the individual review reports is strict. It supports the preparation of the panel meeting following the individual review phase. The individual review reports will be given to the applicants as is, including the names of the reviewers.

3.3. Review panel meeting (online)

The panel members have access to all applications submitted to the panel, with exceptions in the case of conflicts of interest (see [RCF review principles](#), section 1.3). Also, individual reviews for applications continuing to the panel review phase will be made available to all panel members at the latest one week before the meeting. However, please note that these review reports will only be made available to panel members once all review reports have been submitted to the RCF.

At the panel meeting, the panel discusses applications that reached the panel review phase. The individual reviewers appointed to the application will present their opinion on the application and, typically, a third panel member (read-only/reader) may be assigned to read the



application to form an additional, more general view of it. The review panel's summary assessment will be written for each application during the panel meeting by a dedicated summariser (a panel member). The summary is based on the discussions and the individual reviews. The panel decides the final overall rating for each application. When the final overall rating is 5 or 6, also subratings for specified review criteria will be decided by the panel. To complete the review, the panel is asked to rank the applications rated 5 or 6 within each funding instrument. The applications are ranked based on the review criteria used and the instrument-specific objectives listed in the review forms – no additional criteria will be used.

3.4. How to review applications in the online services

Please use the [RCF online services](#) (link takes you to the online services via our website) to review applications. You can find the review instructions and offline versions of all our review forms under [Guides for reviewers](#) on our website. Both individual reviews and panel's summary assessments are completed in the online services. You can access the research plan and other sections in the application form directly from the review form questions. However, we do expect you to read the whole application.

4. Expert fees

There will be a modest compensation for participation, EUR 460 (EUR 600 for panel chair) per panel day (taxed as per your national taxation rules). This compensation also covers participation in a short pre-meeting. Furthermore, EUR 75 (EUR 100 in the case of consortium applications) will be paid for each individual review.

To claim your fees, please enter your own personal banking details in the online services. The fee will be paid into your personal bank account. Please notice that IBAN is mandatory for bank accounts in Europe. Also fill in the BIC/SWIFT code/clearing code/routing number.

Make sure that you have entered your personal details correctly in the online services to avoid any unnecessary delays in the payment. The payslip will be sent to your home address.

