



Instructions for reviewing funding applications - Proof of Concept Funding 2026

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1. Objectives of Research Council of Finland and RCF 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. Proof of Concept Funding

The RCF's Proof of Concept Funding aims to promote versatile utilisation of research results produced in high-quality research projects funded by the RCF or the Strategic Research Council (SRC). The focus of the review should be on the innovativeness and utilisation potential of the



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research results as well as on economic or other societal impact and the feasibility of the plans for utilising research results. The funding is intended for demonstrating the feasibility of ideas on how to utilise research results of RCF-funded and SRC-funded projects. The funding is applied for to employ a team and to cover costs of activities for research utilisation. Read more in [the call text](#).

2. Role of experts and the RCF

Experts are invited to review the research utilisation potential and innovativeness; the feasibility of the applications as well as the research utilisation competence of the applicant(s) and the team members. The experts are esteemed, mostly international researchers in the field of the applications concerned. The funding decisions are made by the RCF's decision-making bodies based on the review and science policy of the RCF and its scientific councils or subcommittees.

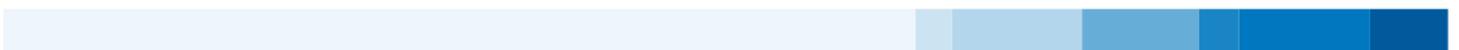
2.1. Panel chair

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.

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 of the applications allocated to them. Typically, individual reviewers also participate in the panel as members. All panel members are expected to actively participate in the panel meeting.

Applications will be allocated 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 but is not asked to write a review. One of the reviewers will be a summariser in the panel meeting and will write the final panel summary review for the application.





2.3. Panels

The applications will be reviewed in panels. RCF officials will allocate the applications to the panels based on the application themes and focuses. The 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 [Subcommittee](#) (link takes you to the RCF website) makes 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 research impact.

3. Review and ranking

3.1. Review criteria and rating scale

The Proof of Concept Funding is intended for projects that are based on the utilisation of research results produced in high-quality research projects funded by RCF or the SRC.

Review criteria:

- Utilisation potential, impact and innovativeness of project idea
- Feasibility and innovativeness of implementation of project idea, including applicant's and team's previous merits and responsible science aspects
- Quality, breadth and significance of user groups and stakeholders for project implementation



The objectives of the funding instruments and the instrument-specific review criteria are presented in section 1 and the review form.

Written reviews: Evaluative comments are particularly valuable to the decision-making bodies. Also, 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. 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.

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 outstanding innovativeness and utilisation potential; demonstrates a highly feasible and innovative plan for utilisation of research results; promises crucial economic or other societal impact
5 (excellent)	Demonstrates very significant innovativeness and utilisation potential; demonstrates a very feasible and innovative plan for utilisation of research results; promises very high economic or other societal impact
4 (good)*	Is in general sound but contains a few elements that could be improved; demonstrates good innovativeness and utilisation potential; promises economic or other societal impact
3 (fair)*	Is in general sound but contains important elements that should be improved; demonstrates some innovativeness and utilisation potential; promises some economic or other societal impact
2 (poor)*	Contains flaws; is in need of substantial modification or improvement; promises very little economic or other societal impact
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 the applications subratings and overall ratings. 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. It is important to note that these reports provide important material for the decision-making bodies and valuable feedback for the applicants.

3.3. Review panel meeting (online)

The panel members have access to all applications submitted to the panel, with exceptions made in the case of conflicts of interest (see Review principles, section 1.3). Also, individual reviews on 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, the panel will also decide subratings for specified review criteria. 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 RCF's online services

Please use the [Research Council of Finland's 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 review reports are completed in the online services. You can access the research plan or other sections in the application form directly from the review form questions. However, we do expect you to read the whole application.

4. Expert remuneration

There will be a modest compensation for participation, EUR 460 (EUR 600 for panel chair) per panel day. 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. Taxes are paid as per your national taxation rules.

To claim your remuneration, please enter your own personal banking details in the online services. The remuneration will be paid into your personal bank account. Please note 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.

