



Instructions for reviewing funding applications - 2026 Thematic research infrastructures: Local research infrastructures to strengthen regional R&D activities

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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. Achieving these objectives entails having competitive researchers, research environments and competence centres as well as high-level research infrastructures that contribute to the renewal of science and society. Our funding is based on open competition, independent peer review and responsible science.



1.1. 2026 Thematic research infrastructures: Local research infrastructures to strengthen regional R&D activities

The 2026 Thematic research infrastructures: Local research infrastructures to strengthen regional R&D activities funding call is designed to support the building and updating of regionally significant local research infrastructures to promote regional vitality and ambitious R&D activities.

The applicant is an individual research organisation, that is, a university of applied sciences, a university, a research institute or some other research organisation, or a consortium formed by them.

The main focus of the review should be on the call objectives:

Funded research infrastructures must contribute to achieving regional R&D-related objectives, which have been mapped out, for example, in smart specialisation strategies and other regional strategies. Funded research infrastructures must generate added value for the region in terms of innovation potential and/or other societal impact and support partnerships and cooperation between R&D actors. They must have operating principles that enable their services to be widely utilised by user groups of the RDI system. The intersectoral collaboration of the research infrastructure in the development project creates mutual added value to the collaborators and for the development project.

Other important review items are the quality of R&D activities facilitated by the research infrastructure, implementation of the development project as well as operational aspects of the research infrastructure. Read more in the [call text](#).

2. Role of experts and the Research Council of Finland

Experts are invited to review the added value/impact, the potential to support excellent R&D activities and the operation of the research infrastructure. The experts are esteemed, mostly international research and development specialists representing different fields.

The funding decisions are made by the RCF's decision-making bodies based on the scientific review and the science policy factors 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. 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 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 without writing 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. Panel

Applications submitted to the 2026 Thematic research infrastructures: Local research infrastructures to strengthen regional R&D activities call are reviewed in one panel. The panel consists of a chair, a vice chair and panel members representing the scope of the panel. A panel may be split if there is a high number of applications addressed to it.

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 according to established RCF procedures.

2.5. Decision-making bodies

After receiving the review reports, the [Scientific Council for Research Infrastructures appointed by the Finnish Government](#) (link takes you to the RCF's website) makes the final funding



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decisions. The decisions are based on the peer review and the objectives of the call, but factors related to science policy may also influence the decisions. Examples of such factors are the objectives outlined in the [long-term plan for research infrastructures 2030 \(PDF\)](#) regarding national and international research infrastructure activities and their comprehensive development.

3. Review and ranking

3.1. Review criteria and rating scale

The main criteria in the review are as follows:

- Support for regional specialisation, added value for region and cooperation between R&D actors (most important criterion)
- R&D potential of research infrastructure
- Feasibility of development project
- Quality of research infrastructure organisation (incl. ownership, long-term financial plan, services and users, digitalisation and data management, and responsible science)

Note that the research security appendix is not part of the review.

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 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).



Rating	Description
6 (outstanding)	Has potential to substantially contribute to achieving regional R&D-related objectives; provides highly significant support to economic growth and/or society as well as includes significant cooperation between R&D actors; enables R&D activities with potential for exceptional quality, ambition and innovation as well as impact with crucial relevance; presents a very high-quality plan that may include risks; operational aspects are well aligned to reach the objectives of the research infrastructure
5 (excellent)	Has potential to substantially contribute to achieving regional R&D-related objectives; provides significant support to economic growth and/or society as well as includes significant cooperation between R&D actors; enables R&D activities with potential for very high quality, ambition and innovation as well as impact with significant relevance; presents a high-quality plan that may include risks; operational aspects are suitable to reach the objectives of the research infrastructure
4 (good)	Has potential to contribute to achieving regional R&D-related objectives; provides support to economic growth and/or society as well as includes good cooperation between R&D actors; enables R&D activities with potential for good quality as well as impact with relevance; is in general sound but contains some elements that could be improved
3 (fair)	Has some potential to contribute to achieving regional R&D-related objectives; provides some support to economic growth and/or society as well as includes cooperation between R&D actors; is in general sound but contains important elements that should be improved
2 (poor)	Has low potential to contribute to achieving regional R&D-related objectives; has low potential for impact in support of economic growth and/or society or cooperation between R&D actors; 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. The 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



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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 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, the panel will also decide subratings for specified review criteria. To complete the review, the panel is asked to group the applications with a final overall rating of 5 or 6. The applications are grouped 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 action plan or



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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 550 (EUR 700 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 150 will be paid for each individual review.

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 notice that IBAN is mandatory for bank accounts in Europe. Also fill in the BIC/SWIFT code/clearing code/routing number.

Please note that if you are not a Finnish citizen and do not have a Finnish social security number, you need to fill in a foreign identity number. This information is mandatory so that the Finnish Tax Administration can allocate it to the correct individual. Please also fill in the Tax Identification Number (TIN) or equivalent if you have it.

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.

