



## Instructions for reviewing funding applications - Call for clinical research

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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. Call for clinical research**

This funding scheme is designed to strengthen clinical research and to promote clinical research careers. The clinical research project should be ambitious and of high scientific quality and implemented by consortia composed of three or more research teams. To reach these objectives the funding should increase collaboration between researchers in wellbeing services counties and other organisations; generate new research knowledge to support social welfare and healthcare, disease treatment, diagnostics, prevention or business activity; and encourage part-time research of physicians or other healthcare professionals engaged in clinical practice to enable broad coverage of speciality expertise within clinical research. The research to be funded should be of a high quality, with a high scientific impact and wide impact beyond academia. For wide societal impact, there should be a clear plan for interaction with key actors in using research findings at different stages of the research project lifecycle. The review should focus on scientific quality, research plan implementation and alignment with the call objectives, including the potential for achieving societal impact. It is equally important to pay attention to the significance of this funding to promote clinical career development of physicians or other healthcare professionals engaged part-time in clinical practice (incl. early-career clinical researchers). Also, consider the expected added value of the consortium and the potential to increase collaboration between consortium partners. The funding is applied for to employ research teams, cover research costs and for part-time salary costs (20–50% of working hours) of physicians or other healthcare professionals engaged in clinical practice. The funding is granted for four years.

### **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**

The review 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 including aspects of responsible science. 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 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**

All applications submitted to the call for clinical research will be evaluated in the same panel. The panel consists of a chair, a possible vice chair and panel members representing the scope of the call.

### **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 a pre-panel meeting when relevant. The officials also take care of the practical arrangements in the panel meeting and ensure that the review process follows established RCF procedures.





## 2.5. Decision-making bodies

After the scientific review, the funding decisions are made by the RCF subcommittee for thematic calls. The decisions are based on the peer review and the panel ranking, taking into account the specific objectives of the call.

## 3. Review and ranking

### 3.1. Review criteria and rating scale

The criteria in the review are:

- project's relevance to call and contribution of application to achieving specific objectives of call (strengthening clinical research, increasing collaboration, part-time clinical researcher career development potential and impact and interaction beyond academia)
- scientific quality, novelty and innovativeness of research (impact within scientific community)
- feasibility of research plan, including responsible science (research ethics, equality and nondiscrimination, open science, sustainable development)
- part-time clinical researcher's career development potential, competence and expected achievements
- expertise, human resources and collaborations, including aspects of responsible science (expected added value of consortium and potential to increase collaboration between consortium partners)

**Written reviews: Please note that, 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.** Evaluative comments are particularly valuable to the decision-making body. Written reviews play a crucial role in aiding the decision-making body. 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            | 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 by at least one reviewer will continue to the panel review phase. The other applications will continue directly to the decision-making process. 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 body and valuable feedback for the applicants.



### 3.3. Review panel meeting (online)

The panel members have access to all applications submitted to the panel, excluding 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 with final overall rating 5 or 6. Also, the specific review criteria on 1.1 project's relevance to call, 2.1 scientific quality, novelty and innovativeness, and 3.2 part-time clinical researcher's career development potential should have final subratings 5 or 6 to end up in ranking. 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 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



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participation in a short pre-meeting. Furthermore, EUR 100 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.

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.

