



Instructions for reviewing funding applications - panel

Flagship Programme call 4 - interim evaluation

Flagship Programme call 5 - new Flagships

Contents

Instructions for reviewing funding applications - panel	1
1 Objectives of Research Council of Finland and funding scheme	1
1.1 Flagship Programme	2
2 Flagship Programme applications and review material	2
3 Roles of experts and the RCF	2
3.1 Individual reviewers and panel members	3
3.2 RCF officials	3
3.3 Decision-making body	4
3.3.1 Applications from current Flagships	4
3.3.2 Applications from candidates for new Flagships	4
4 Review and ranking	4
4.1 Review process for applications from current Flagships	4
4.2 Review process of for applications from candidates for new Flagships	4
4.3 Review criteria and rating scale	5
4.4 Individual review	6
4.5 Review panel meeting	6
4.6 How to review applications in the online services	7
5 Expert remuneration	7

1 Objectives of Research Council of Finland and funding scheme

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 Flagship Programme

The aim of the Finnish Flagship Programme is to support wide-ranging economic and other societal impact based on particularly high-level scientific research. The funding is targeted at competence clusters that are based on cooperation between organisations and that have convincing track records of results and impact. Finnish Flagships bring together expertise from different fields into competence clusters that strengthen the quality and impact of Finnish research. A Flagship is an effective mix of cutting-edge research, impact in support of economic growth and/or society, close connections to the business sector and society at large, adaptability, and a strong commitment from host organisations to meeting the set targets. Read more in the call text for ongoing Flagships (to be published in March 2026) and in the [call text for new Flagships](#).

2 Flagship Programme applications and review material

The panel will be assessing Flagship applications both

- from four current Flagships
- from candidates for new Flagships.

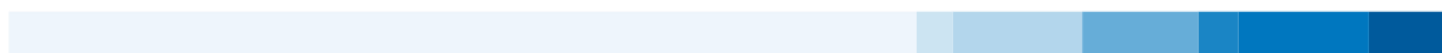
Applications from the two categories do not compete between the categories.

Applications from the ongoing Flagships are invited for the purpose of their interim evaluation. Based on the outcome of the evaluation, the level of funding of the Flagship for the next years (until 2031) will be determined by the decision-making body. In addition to the applications, the review material will include interim reports provided by the Flagships and results of a survey targeted to the stakeholders of the Flagships. As part of the interim evaluation, the panel will interview representatives of the Flagships.

Applications from candidates for new Flagships are invited for the purpose of selecting new Flagship projects to the Finnish Flagship Programme. The review material will consist of the applications and review reports by external reviewers on the applications. The panel will not interview the representatives of the candidate Flagships.

3 Roles of experts and the RCF

Experts are invited to review the Flagship Programme's applications in relation to objectives concerning internationally top-level research, impact in support of economic growth and/or





society, and the role and participation of collaborators. The support provided by the Flagship for the building of internationally competitive competence clusters and ecosystems in Finland, together with the principles of responsible science, will also play a role in the review.

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.

3.1 Individual reviewers and panel members

Experts may act as external reviewers, individual reviewers or panel members. The duties of external and 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.

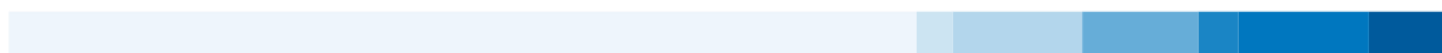
Applications will be assigned to at least two individual reviewers and/or possibly a reader in the panel review phase. The reader is asked to form an opinion of the application without writing a review. One of the reviewers will be a summariser in the panel meeting and will write the final panel's summary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

The panel is assigned a chair from among the panel members. The duties of the chair are to chair the panel meeting, 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 evaluation process and the panel meeting.

All experts are esteemed, international researchers in the field of the reviewed applications.

3.2 RCF officials

The RCF's officials invite the experts, 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.





3.3 Decision-making body

3.3.1 Applications from current Flagships

After receiving the panel's final review reports, the decision-making body (Subcommittee for Research Utilisation) makes the final funding decisions. The decisions are based on a peer review of scientific quality and impact, but factors related to science policy may also influence the decisions. Examples of such factors include the dismantling of gender stereotypes in research and the scientific community, the promotion of diversity within research and the scientific community, and the support of sustainable development.

3.3.2 Applications from candidates for new Flagships

After receiving the panel's final review reports and panel rankings, the decision-making body (Subcommittee for Research Utilisation) makes the final funding decisions. The decisions are based on a peer review of scientific quality, impact and the panel ranking, but factors related to science policy may also influence the decisions. Examples of such factors include the dismantling of gender stereotypes in research and the scientific community, the promotion of diversity within research and the scientific community, and the support of sustainable development.

4 Review and ranking

4.1 Review process for applications from current Flagships

At the first review stage, each application is individually reviewed by at least two reviewers. At the second stage, the applications are rated in the review panel. As a part of the evaluation, the panel has opportunity to interview the representatives of the current Flagships. The review panel's summary assessment of the application will be written during the panel meeting.

4.2 Review process of for applications from candidates for new Flagships

At the first review stage, each application is individually reviewed by three external reviewers. Their reviews will support the subsequent work of the expert panel. If at least one expert has given an overall rating of 5 or 6, the application will proceed to be reviewed by a panel. Two panel members are assigned to each of these applications, and they also write their individual reviews. Finally, the applications are rated in the review panel meeting. 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 that received rating 5 or 6.

4.3 Review criteria and rating scale

The main review factors in the review are:

- 1) demonstrated scientific excellence and impact in support of economic growth and/or society
- 2) plan for promoting scientific excellence and impact in support of economic growth and/or society
- 3) ecosystem and organisation.

More specific review criteria are presented in Appendix 1.

Written reviews: 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.

After the funding decisions, 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 numerical evaluation of the sub-items and final rating is made with a rating scale ranging from 6 (outstanding) to 1 (poor). Where relevant, please consider both scientific excellence and impact in support of economic growth and/or and society when assigning a rating.

Rating scale	Description
6 (outstanding)	Demonstrates exceptional novelty, innovation as well as impact with crucial relevance; has potential to substantially advance science at global level; has



	such novelty or timeliness and promise that extremely significant support to economic growth and/or society is likely
5 (excellent)	Demonstrates novelty, innovation and impact with very high relevance - contains no significant elements to be improved; has such novelty or timeliness and promise that very significant support to economic growth and/or society is likely
4 (good)	Is in general sound but contains a few elements that could be improved; has impact with high relevance, i.e. such novelty or timeliness and promise that significant support to economic growth and/or society is likely
3 (fair)	Is in general sound but contains important elements that should be improved; has impact with relevance, i.e. such novelty or timeliness and promise that some support to economic growth and/or society is likely
2 (poor)	Contains flaws; is in need of substantial modification or improvement; has low potential for impact in support of economic growth and/or society
1 (insufficient)	Contains severe flaws that are intrinsic to the proposed project or the application

4.4 Individual review

Reviewers write individual reviews, using specified sections in the review forms, and give subratings and overall ratings to the applications. After the funding decisions, the individual review reports will be given to the applicants as is, including the names of the reviewers.

4.5 Review panel meeting

The panel members have access to all applications submitted to the panel including possible additional review material as well (see section 2 for details), with exceptions in the case of conflicts of interest (see [Review principles \(PDF\)](#), section 1.3). Also, individual reviews by the panel members for applications 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 thoroughly all applications in the panel. The individual reviewers appointed to the application will present their opinion on the application, and a third panel member (read-only/reader) will 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.

The panel will first assess the applications from the current Flagships and then the applications from candidates for new Flagship. The latter will be ranked once the panel has completed the review of the applications. 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. As a part of the evaluation, the panel has the opportunity to interview representatives of the current Flagships.

4.6 How to review applications in the 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's summary assessments are completed in the online services.

5 Expert remuneration

There will be a compensation for participation, EUR 800 (EUR 1,000 for panel chair) per panel day (taxed as per your national taxation rules). This compensation also covers participation in a panellist webinar. Furthermore, EUR 300 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 payment. The payslip will be sent to your home address.

Appendix 1

- 1) Review form 2026 Flagship Programme call 4 – interim evaluation (to be published in March 2026)
- 2) Review form 2026 Flagship Programme call 5 – new Flagships