Research Council of Finland

17 October 2025

Strategic Research Council (SRC) 2026 programme calls

Instructions for reviewing letters of intent (LOI) – panels

Content

1. Objectives of Strategic Research Council (SRC) funding

The Strategic Research Council (SRC) funds high-quality research that has potential for societal impact. The funding is based on open competition, independent peer review and responsible science. The research should seek to find concrete solutions to grand challenges that require multidisciplinary approaches. The SRC requires a multidisciplinary approach that includes collaboration between multiple research organisations. An essential element of such research is active collaboration between those who produce new knowledge and those who use it.

2. Role of experts and the SRC

Experts are invited to review the applications for compatibility with the programme call, scientific level, societal relevance and impact. The experts are esteemed, national and international experts in the field. The experts have been chosen based on their expertise in the research fields as well as in societal relevance and impact pertinent for the programme call. After receiving the panel review reports, the SRC will decide which consortia are invited to the second call stage based on the panel's final reviews and at its own discretion.

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2.1 Panel chair

Each panel is assigned a chair, who is one of the panel members. The duty of the chair is 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 (before the panel). As a rule, individual reviewers also participate in the panel as panel members. All panel members are expected to actively participate in the panel meeting.

For each application, one of its draft reviewers will be a summariser in the panel meeting to write the final panel summary review for the application.

2.3 Research Council of Finland officials

The Research Council of Finland's (RCF) officials invite the panel members and, if needed, additional external reviews 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.

2.4 Decision-making body

After receiving the panel review reports, the SRC will decide which consortia are invited to the second call stage based on the panel's final reviews and at its own discretion.

3. Review

3.1 Review criteria and rating scale

The main criteria in the review are:

- compatibility with the programme call
- scientific quality
- societal relevance and impact.

The applicants are required to answer all programme questions (A–E) presented in the call text.

The specific review criteria are presented in the review form.

Written reviews: Well-made draft reviews will make the panel work more efficient and be of great help in preparing the final reviews at the panel meeting. Evaluative comments are particularly valuable to the decision-making bodies. Also, after the

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funding decisions have been made, the applicants can access the panel summary assessment on their own applications. The summary assessment includes the names of the panel members barring COIs. If requested, the draft reviews with the names of reviewers who have supplied them will also be disclosed to the applicant. (Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities). The reviews provide the applicants with important feedback. Reviewers should therefore:

- write evaluative comments and give justifications using full sentences
- avoid descriptive comments and copying text directly from the application
- write comments under each review-item
- maintain coherence throughout comments and give constructive feedback which can be used, if agreed, as such in the panel review report.

Numerical rating: The consistency between the numerical rating and the written comments is particularly important. For the draft review, an overall rating (1–6) is given. The rating scale is explained below.

Rating	Description
6 (extremely promising)	has a very high potential to substantially advance science at an international level and make a significant contribution to policy or practice; demonstrates exceptional novelty and/or innovation to address an important problem
5 (very promising)	has a high potential to substantially advance science at an international level and make a significant contribution to policy or practice; contains no significant elements to be improved
4 (promising)	has a potential to substantially advance science at an international level and make a significant contribution to policy or practice, but contains some elements that should be improved
3 (moderate)	is in general sound and of relevance to the scientific community and policy or practice, but contains important elements that should be improved
2 (limited)	adds to understanding but is not of sufficient relevance to influence science, policy or practice; needs substantial modification or improvement
1 (insufficient)	is irrelevant and contains severe flaws

3.2 Individual review (draft review)

Each application is assigned to at least two individual reviewers, who can be either panel members or experts outside the panel. Reviewers write individual draft reviews and give overall ratings (1–6) to the applications. Applications will then continue to the panel review phase. Therefore, the **deadline for submitting the individual review reports is essential** to enable the preparation of the panel meeting following the individual review phase.

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3.3 Review panel meeting (online)

The panel members have access to all applications submitted to the panel, barring conflicts of interest (see Review principles, section 1.3). Also, the individual draft reviews for each application will be compiled and made available to all panel members at the latest one week before the meeting. However, please note that the compiled review reports will only be made available to panel members once all draft reviews have been submitted.

At the panel meeting, the panel will discuss the applications. The individual reviewers appointed to an application will present their opinion on the application first, followed, if desired, by other panel members. The panel prepares one joint panel review report on each application (letter of intent) based on its discussion. Based on the overall rating and the panel discussion, the panel will in the meeting assign each application into category A, B or C depending on how strongly it recommends that the project be invited to the second stage of the reviewing process. Category C means that the panel does not recommend the application to proceed to the second stage. Category B is for applications that have weaknesses but are nevertheless worth considering. Category A means that the panel recommends the application to proceed to the next stage.

It is useful for all panel members to get acquainted with all applications. RCF staff will assist the panel in preparing the panel review reports.

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 the Council's website) for the review. You can find the review instructions and offline versions of all review forms under Guides for reviewers on the RCF website. Both individual reviews and panel review reports are completed in the online services.

4. Expert remuneration

There will be a modest compensation for participation, EUR 460 (EUR 600 to panel chair) per panel day (taxed as per your national taxation rules). This remuneration also covers participation in a short pre-meeting. Furthermore, EUR 80 will be paid for each individual draft 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 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 payment. The payslip will be sent to your home address.