

FUNDING PRINCIPLES OF THE STRATEGIC RESEARCH COUNCIL

Decided by the Strategic Research Council on 18 October 2021

1. Introduction

The Strategic Research Council (SRC) is an independent body established within the Academy of Finland that provides funding to solution-oriented, phenomenon-driven and programme-based research. Each year, the SRC prepares a proposal on key strategic research themes and priorities to be approved by the Finnish Government. The Government decides the final themes, which the SRC then formulates into research programmes. The projects to be funded must be of a high scientific standard and have societal relevance and impact. An important element of strategic research is the interaction between researchers and knowledge users throughout the projects.

The SRC follows the Academy of Finland's criteria for research funding decisions, as appropriate. This document defines the funding principles decided separately by the SRC that deviate from the Academy's criteria. The SRC's activities are also guided by the Act and Decree on the Academy of Finland and by the Academy's Rules of Procedure. The practical implementation of research funding is described in more detail in the Academy's funding terms and conditions and in the latest call texts.

2. Applying for funding

Programme calls

SRC funding may be granted to consortia that work under a joint research and interaction plan and a funding plan. In order to achieve broad and multidisciplinary composition, at least three different organisations must participate in the consortium. The research to be conducted in the consortium must belong to at least three research fields listed in the Academy of Finland's research field classification.

A consortium must have a principal investigator (PI) and an interaction coordinator. Consortium PIs must have a doctoral degree and hold the title of docent or have research experience at the docent level.

The SRC requires that consortium PIs commit themselves with a sufficient level of input to heading the consortium. A consortium PI may be assigned as PI in only one SRC-funded consortium at a time. Similarly, subproject PIs or WP leaders cannot have equivalent assignments in other consortia under the

same programme. Directors of the Academy of Finland's Centres of Excellence cannot act as PIs for SRC consortia.

SRC funding will not be granted to a person who has participated in the planning of the concerned programme or followed the planning to an extent likely to give them a comparative advantage over other applicants. Members of the Academy Board, the Academy's research councils or the SRC will not be granted SRC funding during their terms. Nor will funding be granted if a member of one of these bodies or a person who has participated in the planning of the programme concerned acts as a WP leader in an SRC consortium.

The consortium projects funded under SRC programmes receive funding for 3–6 years. The research plan will be drawn up for the entire project period, but in programmes exceeding four years, funding will, as a rule, be applied for in two parts. In this case, a follow-up call will be organised in the middle of the programme period. In connection with the call, consortia will report on their activities and submit a detailed research and funding plan for the second funding period.

The SRC funding contribution comes to 100 per cent, following the full cost model. The consortium's funding plan may also include the full-time salaries of the PI, the subproject PIs and the WP leaders. The funding may be granted to a foreign site of research, but the foreign site must not account for a considerable part of the consortium's funding plan. The funding is granted in euros.

As a rule, SRC funding is not granted to support economic activity. Economic activity is defined as all activity where goods or services are offered on an open market. However, funding may be granted to an economic operator if the activity to be funded is not an economic activity and the economic activity of the operator can be separated from the activity to be financed in accounting or if the funding can be granted in accordance with the de minimis regulation (Commission Regulation 1407/2013).

Funding for programme directors

A part-time programme director employed by their own background organisation, such as a university or research institute, is selected for each SRC programme. The programme directors are responsible for programme-level development of interaction and cross-programme cooperation, and they promote the societal impact of strategic research.

The funding for programme directors is project-based funding. The funding is applied for to the programme director's background organisation. It consists of the salary costs for the director's part-time work and the operating costs for programme management. The salary costs shall correspond to 40–60% of the working hours, depending on the number of programmes being managed. In addition, a maximum of 1,000 euros per month may be granted for operating expenses for each managed programme. A programme director may manage up to two programmes.

National EU matching funds

Until 2021, the SRC grants national matching funds to sites of research based on projects that have received funding under the Societal Challenges priority of Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. SRC matching funds can be applied for by research organisations to compensate for funding shortfalls, referring to the difference between the overheads percentage calculated using the Finnish full cost model and the indirect costs reimbursement calculated using the Horizon 2020 model. Organisations can submit applications as soon as they have received the final, signed funding decision from the European Commission.

3. How applications are reviewed

Programme calls

The review of applications for SRC funding largely follows the Academy of Finland's review practices and utilises the Academy's information systems. SRC members may act as reviewers of applications submitted to the SRC.

Applications for funding from SRC research programmes will be reviewed based on both scientific quality and societal relevance and impact. The research and interaction plan appended to the application shall describe both the scientific activities and the societal relevance of the project. The SRC will use the review panels' assessments of the scientific quality and societal significance of the applications as criteria for selecting the projects to be funded. Attention will also be paid to possible interviews with applicants and the achievement of any science policy objectives set for the programme call. In addition, the selection takes into account aspects related to the formation of the programme package.

Funding for programme directors

Applications by programme director candidates will be reviewed by the SRC. The selection is based on an overall picture of the application documents and the interviews with applicants with regard to the suitability of the action plan for the objectives of the programme as well as with regard to the competence of the applicant and their familiarity with the subject of the programme.

National EU matching funds

The SRC grants national matching funds for all applications that meet the application criteria and that are submitted by the deadline. The total amount to be used for matching funds shall be decided annually by the SRC. The rate of compensation is determined based on the money available, that is, all applications funded each year will be funded with same rate.

4. Use of funding, terms and conditions

Since the pursuit of social impact is a key element in SRC programmes, the funded consortia are required to participate actively both in the interaction activities of their own programme and in the cross-programme activities for social impact.

Easy access to the results produced in the projects – research data, scientific publications and other outputs – even after the end of the programme period, is important for the impact of strategic research. For this reason, it is recommended that the site of research commits to maintaining the project website 3–5 years after the end of the funding period.

5. Impact evaluation

The SRC monitors the funded projects and assesses their impact. The funded projects report on their activities both during the funding period and after the funding has ended. Programme directors, too, are obliged to report on their activities.

The purpose of the monitoring during the funding period is: 1) to encourage projects and programme directors to regularly review their activities in relation to the joint objectives of the programme and the project's or programme director's own impact objectives; 2) to gather information for the cross-programme activities for social impact and the communication of strategic research; and 3) to gather information on the activities of projects and programme directors for the final evaluation.

The final evaluation will be a programme-level assessment. The aim of the final evaluation is to assess the current or prospective scientific and societal impact of the programmes, and to develop the strategic research funding instrument. The evaluation will focus on the processes, outputs and outcomes of the research and interaction activities funded under the programme, as well as their observed or anticipated effects. A particular focus in the review will be on the results of multidisciplinary work and the ability to promote scientific renewal. Special characteristics of each programme and project, as well as different societal roles of science are all considered in the impact review.

The monitoring and evaluation shall take into account the obligation to monitor the effects as defined in the Finnish Act on Discretionary Government Transfers (688/2001). The monitoring and evaluation follow the principles of open and responsible science. For example, the materials to be used and the results of the evaluation will be published as openly as possible. The methods are transparent and quantitative analyses repeatable. Additionally, the appropriateness of the follow-up and evaluation system is inspected regularly.