Summary of reviewer feedback in the Academy's September 2018 call: natural sciences and engineering research proposals

ACADEMY OF FINLAND

1.   Scientific quality

Majority of the review panels identified excellent or outstanding proposals, which were competitive in an international comparison. However, the quality of the proposals varied significantly within the panels and among the fields of research.

To improve the quality of the proposals, many panels highlighted the importance of **including sufficient scientific details in the proposal**. This is particularly important for receiving a high grade in scientific quality and innovativeness (item 1.1) and in implementation of research plan (item 1.2 or 1.3) in the review form. **A clear description of the novelty and innovativeness of the proposed research** was a prerequisite for receiving a high grade in the review item 1.1. Notably, **the description of the implementation of the work was often insufficiently detailed**, and this was reflected in the grade. Here, incorporation of possible preliminary results in the proposal could be helpful.

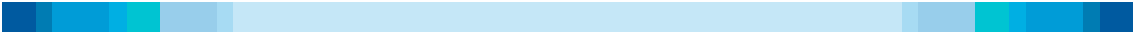# 2.   Competence, collaboration, and mobility

Several panels were impressed by the many highly networked and internationally-oriented applicants. However, the panelists often raised the concern regarding **non-specific description of collaborators and their roles in the research work**, and pointed out that simply providing a list of collaborators is not sufficient.

Many panels encouraged the applicants for *the Academy Research Fellow and Postdoctoral Researcher* posts to address in the proposal their level of independence and how the post would advance their career.

Many panels pointed out that international mobility consisting of longer research periods in world-class and well-justified teams is important especially for early-career researchers. In the application the planned mobility should always be described clearly and in sufficient details accompanied with invitation letters from the mobility hosts as appendices. The mobility plan should support the research plan and it should be tightly connected to the schedule of the project.

3.   Additional feedback

- The applicants should prepare the research plan, CV, publication list and other appendices according to the Academy's guidelines so as to facilitate systematic panel review.

- The applicants should include only published and accepted papers – not submitted ones – in the publication list.

- The applicants should place emphasis on describing clearly and properly the state-of-the-art, management and organizational aspects, research methods, research hypotheses and objectives in the proposal.

- The applicants are encouraged to discuss the proposal with colleagues before submission. Receiving some mentoring in preparation of application is particularly important for younger applicants with limited experience in applying for research funding. This would be helpful also to applicants who change their research area.

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- The applicants should state out possible connections between different proposals (e.g. postdoctoral applicant is planned to be hired in an Academy project) in the proposal.

- Depending on the nature of the project, ethical aspects, open science, and data management can be of pronounced significance. In those cases, the panelists encouraged the applicants to pay more attention to these issues.

- Some applications were clearly hastily and poorly prepared and would have benefited from proof-reading.

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