

Instructions for reviewing funding applications

Centre of Excellence Programme 2022-2029 call

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1. Role of experts and the Academy of Finland

The Academy of Finland funds cutting-edge and innovative research aiming at significant scientific breakthroughs. Our funding is based on open competition, independent peer review and responsible science principles. We grant funding to the best researchers and research teams as well as to the most promising junior researchers through several funding instruments.

Experts are invited to review the scientific excellence of the submitted funding applications and rank the reviewed applications. The reviews are finalised in expert panel meetings.

After receiving the panel review reports, decision-making bodies (research councils or subcommittees) make the final funding decisions. The decisions are based on a peer review of scientific quality and panel ranking, but factors related to science policy may also influence the decisions. Examples of such factors are the promotion of equal opportunities for all genders, the advancement of junior researchers' careers and impact beyond academia.



2. Confidentiality and ethics

According to the Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities, research plans, abstracts, progress reports and reviews are confidential documents. Application documents should therefore be handled and stored with due care and confidentiality.

The Academy of Finland is committed to following the guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity for responsible conduct of research. The guidelines also apply to reviewing funding applications, research programmes and scientific disciplines. All reviews must be handled confidentially, competently and impartially, based on the criteria set for the review process. Care must be taken to ensure that the review complies with general stipulations about conflicts of interest. Prior notice must be given if a reviewer has economic or other affiliations or significantly different schools of thought in relation to the applicant under review. This is a way to avoid conflicts of interest.

As a reviewer, you are not allowed to disclose any information concerning application documents or reviews to outsiders, nor are you allowed to use this confidential information to your own benefit or anyone else's benefit or disadvantage. You may not reveal to outsiders that you are assessing the research plan of a particular researcher. If you are contacted by anyone, including the applicant, who has questions about the application or reviews, please advise them to contact the Academy of Finland.

Reviewers are guilty of research misconduct if they misappropriate research ideas from applications. The quality of the review is not a research-ethical issue unless the review has been conducted carelessly, which may give an appearance of a review that deliberately either underrates or overrates the applicants under review.

Disclosing the contents of research plans to third parties or contacting applicants personally without explicit agreement to do so are also regarded as instances of inappropriate behaviour on the part of reviewers.

Once the review has been completed, you are required to destroy all application documents and any copies made of them, or to return them to the Academy. Confidentiality must also be maintained after the review process has been completed. Reviews are confidential documents, but applicants will have access to the panel review reports on their own application after the funding decisions have been made. The draft reviews and external draft reviews are also confidential documents unless otherwise stated in the applicable legislation or required by court order.

After the funding decisions have been made, the Academy will publish a list of names, current positions and institutions of all individual reviewers and panel members used in the call. In addition, the applicants will see the names of all panel members in the panel review report. If requested, the names of reviewers that have supplied the draft reviews will also be disclosed to the applicant (under the Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities).

3. Conflicts of interest

As a reviewer you are required to declare any personal interests according to the criteria below. You must disqualify yourself if you can in any way benefit from the approval or rejection of the application. You must also disqualify yourself in the following circumstances:

- You have collaborated with the applicant (e.g. you have co-authored and published an article or manuscript with the applicant in the past three years, been involved in the preparation of the application, or are involved in the publication or application of the results).
- You have been a superior, subordinate or instructor of the applicant in the past three years.
- You are applying for the same post as the applicant.
- You are applying for funding from the Academy from the same funding instrument.
- The applicant is a close person to you. A close person is:



- a) your spouse (also de facto), child, grandchild, sibling, parent, grandparent or a person otherwise close to you (e.g. fiancé/e or a close friend), as well as their spouses (also de facto)
- b) a sibling of your parent or his/her spouse (also de facto), a child of your sibling, or your previous spouse (also de facto)
- c) a child, grandchild, sibling, parent or grandparent of your spouse as well as their spouses (also de facto), or a child of a sibling of your spouse
- d) or a half-relative comparable to the above-mentioned persons.

You are also disqualified if your impartiality may be endangered in any other way, or if you feel that you have a conflict of interest and are therefore disqualified to review the application.

If you identify any conflicts of interest, please notify us as soon as possible.

4. Reviewer's declaration

Please acknowledge that by accepting the task of a reviewer you guarantee not to disclose the information you receive and not to use it for anybody's benefit or disadvantage as stated in section 2 above (Confidentiality and ethics). Further, you affirm that you will immediately notify the Academy if you have a conflict of interest in one or more applications.

5. Review and ranking (only on 2nd stage)

In the 1st stage of the evaluation the letters of intent are peer-reviewed **by individual international experts**. In the 2nd stage of the evaluation the full applications are peer-reviewed by **panels of experts** (face-to-face, virtual, or mixed model). The panels will also interview the applicants.

How to review applications in the Academy's online services

Please use the Academy of Finland's online services to review applications. All review reports are completed in the online services. You can access the items of the research plan directly from the corresponding review form questions. However, we do expect you to read the full application.

You can find the review instructions and offline versions of all our review forms under [Guides for reviewers](#) on our website.

Reviewing funding applications

Written reviews: Evaluative comments are particularly valuable to the decision-making bodies. After the funding decisions have been made, the applicants can access the panel review report on their own application. The review also provides the applicant with important feedback.

Reviewers should therefore:

- write evaluative rather than descriptive comments (avoid copying text directly from the application)
- write comments under each sub-item
- write coherent comments in the passive voice, which can be used, if agreed, as such in the panel review report.

Numerical evaluation: 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).

6 (outstanding)	Demonstrates exceptional novelty and innovation; has potential to substantially advance science at global level; is a high-gain project that may include risks
5 (excellent)	Is extremely good in international comparison – contains no significant elements to be improved
4 (very good)	Is in general sound but contains a few elements that could be improved
3 (good)	Is in general sound but contains important elements that should be improved
2 (fair)	Contains flaws; is in need of substantial modification or improvement
1 (poor)	Contains severe flaws that are intrinsic to the proposed project or the application

Review criteria

The main criteria in the review are:

- 1) scientific quality, innovativeness and novelty value of the research as well as its impact within the scientific community
- 2) feasibility of research plan
- 3) competence of applicant and research team in terms of project implementation
- 4) quality of research environment and collaborative networks

At all levels of the review process, please pay close attention to the potential for breakthrough research.

Responsible researcher evaluation

When reviewing the competence of the applicant, please pay attention to that the Academy of Finland is a signatory of [DORA](#) (link takes you to Dora's website), the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, which makes recommendations for improving research assessment practices. The Academy adheres to the recommendations, as outlined in DORA, in its peer review processes.

In particular, you are asked to consider the content and quality of publications, rather than their number or venue of publication, or the impact of the journals in which they were published. You are also asked to consider the diverse range of research outputs listed in the CV. Types of outputs vary between disciplines.

You are also asked to be sensitive to legitimate delays in publication, and personal factors or other types of leave, part-time work and disabilities, which may have affected the applicant's record of outputs.



Ranking applications -In 2nd stage of the evaluation

After the panel has completed the review of the applications within a funding instrument during the panel meeting, it will also be asked to rank the applications (or some of the applications) within each instrument. The applications are ranked based on the review criteria (see Appendix 1) – no additional criteria are used.

6. Responsible science

Research ethics

The Academy of Finland requires that the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity guidelines [Responsible conduct of research and procedures](#) (link takes you to the Board's website) for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland is followed in all Academy-funded research. We also require that researchers follow ALLEA's (All European Academies) [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) (link takes you to ALLEA's website) when engaging in international collaboration.

The Academy will not process a funding application if the applicant has been found guilty of research misconduct in the three years preceding the year of the call. If the Academy finds out about the misconduct during the funding period, whatever is left of the funding period will be added to the three-year limit. If the applicant appeals the decision on the misconduct, and the appeal is successful, the Academy will process the applicant's new applications following normal procedures. Read more about the [ethical questions](#) on the Academy's website.

Equality and non-discrimination

The Academy of Finland's research funding promotes equality and non-discrimination as part of responsible science. To secure responsible reviews and decision-making, the Academy is, in accordance with its [Equality and non-discrimination plan 2019–2020](#), committed to defining the means to support combining work and family life and the research careers of women in all funding opportunities. Therefore, career breaks due to family leaves cannot be evaluated negatively in the evaluation process.

The Academy requires that all Academy-funded research promotes gender equality and non-discrimination. Academy reviews and decision-making emphasise the importance of promoting equality and non-discrimination either in the suggested project or in the wider society. Gender is not part of the information in the applications under review.

In the review of applications, the Academy of Finland asks reviewers to pay attention to the unconscious bias that affects us all. Unconscious bias refers to a positive bias towards our “ingroup” and a negative bias towards our “outgroup”. For example, when you are assessing whether the research is groundbreaking and whether the applicant is competent enough to carry out the proposed project, pay special attention to the possible unconscious biases that you might have and that could have an impact on your evaluation. The very act of realising hidden biases makes them less powerful.

In review (especially in panels), it is easier to detect unconscious biases in others than in yourself. We ask you to be prepared to call out bias when you see it.

Open science

The Academy of Finland is committed to promoting the principles and practices of open science to improve the quality, responsibility and social impact of science. The goal is to make all outputs produced and used in research (research publications, data, methods and metadata) widely available for reuse. The principles of open science must be pursued with due attention to good scientific practice and law. The degrees of data openness may justifiably vary, ranging from fully open to strictly confidential. Read more about [the Academy of Finland’s open science policy](#) on our website.

When reviewing publication plans, reviewers are asked to take note of the Academy of Finland’s open access policy and value the applicants’ efforts to publish in OA journals or use other alternatives that secure the open access aims.



When reviewing applicants' preliminary presentations on data management and open access to research data, reviewers are asked to take note of the Academy of Finland's research data policy and value the applicants' effort to open the research data collected during the research.

Reviewers are also asked to support well justified arguments, if the applicant states that no research data is collected or gives understandable reasons for not opening the research data.

The funded projects submit a full research data management plan after the positive funding decision has been made.

Appendix 1

- 1) Review form Centre of Excellence Programme 2022-2029