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INSTRUCTIONS FOR REVIEWING RESEARCH APPLICATIONS – PANELS

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APPENDIX 1: FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

1 ROLE OF EXPERTS AND THE ACADEMY OF FINLAND

The Academy of Finland grants funding to the best researchers and research teams as well as to the most promising junior researchers through several funding instruments (see appendix 1). Experts are invited to review the scientific excellence of the submitted research applications. In most cases, the reviews are finalised in expert panel meetings.

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

2 EXPERT PANEL MEETING

Before the meeting takes place, each application is assigned to at least two panel members who then prepare preliminary reports. All preliminary reports will be made available to the panel members before the meeting. In some cases, an application may be sent to an expert outside the panel to provide additional knowledge pertaining to a particular field.

The panel of experts consists of esteemed, mostly international researchers in the field. At the meeting, the panel will review all applications assigned to it and prepare one joint final review for each application based on the discussions and the preliminary reports. Academy staff will assist the panel in preparing the final reviews. **The panel members have access to all applications assigned to the panel**, barring conflicts of interest (see below).

3 REVIEW

3.1 Reviewing research applications

WRITTEN REVIEWS: Evaluative comments are particularly valuable to the decision-making bodies. After the funding decisions have been made, the applicants get access to the final panel review on their own application. The review also provides the applicant with important feedback. Reviewers should therefore:

- give evaluative comments rather than descriptive phrases
- write comments under each sub-item
- write coherent phrases that can be used, if agreed, as such in the final panel review.

NUMERICAL EVALUATION: The consistency between the numerical rating and the written comments is particularly important. Please rate all sub-items as well as Item 1 (Quality of research plan) and Item 2 (Competence of applicant(s), quality of research collaborations). Please rate the application using this scale:

6 = outstanding: Demonstrates exceptional novelty and innovation. Potential to substantially advance science at global level. High gain projects that can include risks.
5 = excellent: Extremely good in international comparison – no significant elements to be improved.
4 = very good: In general sound, but contains a few elements that could be improved.
3 = good: In general sound, but contains important elements that should be improved.
2 = fair: Contains flaws. In need of substantial modification or improvement.
1 = poor: Severe flaws that are intrinsic to the proposed project or the application.

3.2 Items to be reviewed

There are two main items in the review, (1) quality of research plan, and (2) competence of applicant(s), quality of research collaborations. However, the evaluation forms for different funding instruments may have minor differences in sub-items. At all levels of the review process, you are advised to pay attention to potential breakthrough research (cf. items 1.1 and 1.2). The main items are divided into sub-items as follows:

1 Quality of research plan (rating 1–6)

- 1.1 Scientific quality and innovativeness of research plan (sub-rating 1–6)
 - *Mainly items 2 and 3A in research plan*
- 1.2 Feasibility of research plan (sub-rating 1–6)
 - *Mainly items 3A, 4 and 6 in research plan*
- 1.3 Good scientific practices (no numerical rating)
 - *Mainly items 3C and 5 in research plan, and attached data management plan*

If you are reviewing applications for Academy Programmes, Targeted Academy Projects or Joint Projects, there is an additional sub-item concerning the project's relevance to the programme or call (*Mainly item 2 in research plan*).

2 Competence of applicant(s), quality of research collaborations (rating 1–6)

- 2.1 Competence and expertise of applicant(s) (sub-rating 1–6)
 - *Mainly attached CV(s), list(s) of publications and item 8 in research plan*
- 2.2 Research team, significance of research collaborations (sub-rating 1–6)
 - *Mainly item 7 in research plan*
- 2.3 Researcher mobility (sub-rating 1–6)
 - *Mainly item 9 in research plan, and attached invitations*
- 2.4 Research consortium (if applicable; no numerical rating)



3.3 Overall assessment

Please give a final rating and an overall assessment for the application including lists of **strengths** and **weaknesses** as well as any additional comments. The final rating should not be a mathematical average of the sub-ratings. For example, the application should not be penalised if it has a slight weakness in one evaluation item that is later strengthened in another item (for example lack of some expertise in local team, but obtained through international collaboration).

It is important to comment on both the strengths and the weaknesses of the application. You are also encouraged to comment on the effects and impact beyond academia, see item 3B in research plan. However, impact beyond academia should not affect the scientific review/rating of the application. Instead, it will be considered as an additional factor when making the funding decisions.

3.4 Reviewing consortium projects

Project funding may also be applied for by a **consortium of several applicants typically working at different sites**. A consortium is a more integrated form of a research project than research collaboration between two or more independent research projects, because **a consortium project has a common abstract, research plan and public description**. Besides the common elements of the application, the application of the consortium must also include the budgets, lists of publications and curricula vitae for the principal investigators of the sub-projects participating in the consortium.

A consortium application is reviewed as a single application. In the review, the joint research plan and the competence of **all** principal investigators should be discussed, as well as the **added value of the consortium** for the attainment of the objectives of the whole project (cf. review item 2.4).

3.5 Open Science

The Academy is committed to promoting the practices outlined in Finland's national Open Science and Research Roadmap 2014–2017. Openness improves the overall quality and impact of research and is part of the good scientific practice. The Academy requires that their funded projects commit to open access publishing and open their research data and methods for further use. For research data there can be varying degrees of openness ranging from open access to strictly confidential due to research ethics and law. The experts are asked to give their view on the planned open science activities under review item *good scientific practices*.

3.6 How to review applications in the Academy's online services

To review applications, please use the online services available on the Academy's website. Both preliminary reports and final panel reviews are made in the online services. You can find the review instructions and all our evaluation forms for current calls at: <http://www.aka.fi/en/review-and-funding-decisions/how-applications-are-reviewed/guides-for-reviewers/>.

4 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ETHICS

In Finland, according to the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999), 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 the process of 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 is conducted in accordance with general stipulations about conflict of interest. Prior notice to ensure no conflicts of interest exist is required if a reviewer has economic or other affiliations or significantly different schools of thought in relation to the applicant under review.

As a reviewer, you are not allowed to disclose any information concerning application documents or evaluations 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 behavior 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 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 final review on their own application after the funding decisions have been made.

After the funding decisions have been made, the Academy of Finland will publish a list of names, titles 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 final review. If requested, the names of reviewers giving the preliminary reports will also be disclosed (Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities).

5 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 collaboration with the applicant (e.g. you have co-authored and published an article or manuscript with the applicant in the past three years; you have been involved in the preparation of the application; or you 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 currently applying for the same post as the applicant.
- You are currently 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 the Academy as soon as possible.

6 DECLARATION FOR THE REVIEWER TO ACCEPT

Please acknowledge that by accepting the task of a reviewer you guarantee not to disclose the information you receive as reviewer and not to use it for anybody's benefit or disadvantage as stipulated in section 4 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.

APPENDIX 1: FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

1 FUNDING FOR RESEARCHERS

Postdoctoral Researchers (3-year funding)

The aim of the Academy of Finland's funding for research posts as Postdoctoral Researcher is to support the most promising researchers who have recently completed their doctoral degree in gaining competence for demanding researcher or expert positions. Postdoctoral Researchers have established effective national or international collaborative networks. In the review of applications, particular attention will be paid to the international dimension of the research plan. Postdoctoral Researchers are encouraged to engage in international mobility and collaboration.

Funding can be applied for the Postdoctoral Researcher's own salary, personal research costs and may include one or several mobility spells as well as funding for return to Finland. Funding is not granted for purposes of hiring a research team. In principle, the projects must serve Finnish research and society or international collaboration.

Academy Research Fellows (5-year funding)

Those who are granted a research post as Academy Research Fellow receive funding for their own salary for five years. An Academy Research Fellow funded by the Academy of Finland works on a research plan of a high scientific quality. Academy Research Fellows have built extensive research networks and the funding allows them to develop their skills of academic leadership and to establish themselves as independent researchers. The applicant is a researcher with 3–9 years of experience since PhD completion, or 3–13 years provided that they have since completed medical specialist training.

The posts as Academy Research Fellow give researchers a good opportunity to work independently on their research and to contribute to developing the research in their field. Academy Research Fellows are encouraged to engage in international research collaboration and mobility across international and sectoral borders. Academy Research Fellows may be granted funding for research costs and for setting up a research team of their own. After having received a fellowship, Academy Research Fellows can apply funding for research costs.

Funding for clinical researchers (4-year funding)

The aim is to promote clinical research careers in cooperation with, for example, university hospitals, and to encourage research alongside clinical practice. The applicant is a medical doctor or other researcher working in clinical practice with a doctorate. Funding is not granted to applicants who work as full-time university researchers. The funding towards salary costs is intended to support part-time research by clinical researchers (20–50% of working hours). In addition to funding for salary costs, the Academy may also award a research grant for research costs. The applications are evaluated by the same criteria as Academy Research Fellows or Postdoctoral Researchers, depending on the merits of the applicant.



2 FUNDING FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS

Academy Projects (4-year funding)

The Academy Project funding scheme is designed to promote the quality and diversity of research, scientific impact and impact beyond academia as well as science self-renewal. The aim is to attain internationally as high a scientific standard of work as possible and to support scientific breakthroughs and top-tier international research collaboration.

Academy funding can be used to cover both direct and indirect research costs of the research team. The funding is granted primarily to teams of researchers with doctoral degrees. Within Academy Projects, we encourage researchers to engage in international mobility that will support their research. Funding to cover the salary costs of the principal investigator of an Academy Project may be granted for a period of no more than twelve months.

Targeted Academy Projects (2–4-year funding)

A Targeted Academy Project is like a normal Academy Project but with predetermined targets for funding. The Academy Board or research councils may decide to direct funding to specific areas, considering objectives such as strengthening a particular discipline (e.g. as a result of a discipline or research field assessment) or promoting the internationalisation of research.

Joint projects (2–4-year funding)

Joint project funding is Targeted Academy Project funding that is targeted for example at international calls for joint projects with foreign funding agencies.

Academy Programmes (4-year funding)

Academy Programmes are thematic, target-oriented and coordinated body of collaborative research projects in a specified research theme. The specific theme can arise also from the use of the same methodology, research data or infrastructure. The general aim is to produce knowledge in the field or problems specified in the Academy Programme Memorandum, to raise the overall quality of research and to promote renewal of science as well as the foresighting of future research needs. A major emphasis in Academy Programmes is on multi- and interdisciplinarity approaches as well as international cooperation. Academy programmes aim at raising scientific and societal impact of research and generating substantial added value when compared to funding projects in the general call.