



12 April 2024

Research Council of Finland - CoARA Action Plan

About the Research Council of Finland

The Research Council of Finland is an expert organisation in science and research. We fund high-quality scientific research, provide expertise in science and science policy and strengthen the position of science and research. We are a government agency within the administrative branch of the Finnish Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

The Research Council of Finland signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA) and joined the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) on 22 November 2022. Already in 2020, we had outlined that responsible researcher evaluation is a key element of responsible science, and we have implemented these principles thoroughly in our research funding processes since 2021.

Responsible assessment principles

In 2023, the Research Council of Finland [published a new strategy](#). Our mission is to open new avenues for excellent, responsible and high-impact research, and one of our impact objectives reads "The Finnish scientific community is a pioneer of responsible science".

The fundamental principles of responsible assessment are transparency, integrity, equity, competence and diversity. We follow responsible practices in all research funding activities, including disqualification and confidentiality, equality and nondiscrimination, open science and sustainable development.

Our review practices, review criteria and decision criteria are openly available in the application guidelines and call texts. High-level international peer review is our key tool for identifying the best and most promising research projects. The review criteria are considered in line with the researcher or research group being assessed. The review is mainly based on a qualitative peer review of the research plan. The reviewers are esteemed researchers in their field or otherwise considered peers with regard to the application. Applications are typically reviewed in panels, but additional methods such as interviews or rebuttals can be used where necessary.

Our decision-making takes into account the many different career paths of researchers, the impact of research and the promotion of open access. The criteria and policies guiding our funding decisions are made available on our website before calls are opened.

The principles are supported by our commitments to international and national declarations on responsible research and researcher assessment:

- 2019: DORA, San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment
[sfdora.org](https://www.sfdora.org)



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- 2020: Good practice in researcher evaluation. Recommendation for the responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland
avointiede.fi
- 2022: Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA), and CoARA
coara.eu

Reformed assessment practices - actions taken 2020-2023

The Research Council of Finland has implemented the principles of responsible researcher review in practice in all research funding processes since 2021. The main actions taken and their connection to ARRA's core commitments are as follows:

- When reviewing the competence of the applicant, the content and quality of publications is considered instead of the number or venue of publication, or the impact of the journals in which they were published. (ARRA commitment 2)
- Use of journal-based metrics (e.g. Journal Impact Factors) as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles to assess an individual scientist's contributions is not allowed. (ARRA commitment 3)
- Use of any citation metrics must be responsible, if used at all. Citation metrics, such as the h-index, used in isolation do not describe the impact, importance or quality of publications and can potentially be misleading when applied to peer review. Citation metrics are dependent on the citation practices of different research fields and are therefore not a reliable comparative measure in multidisciplinary panel review. (ARRA commitment 3)
- Applicants are not allowed to include any journal-based metrics or other citation metrics in their application. (ARRA commitment 3)
- When assessing researchers' merits and their competence in delivering the proposed research, the value and impact of all research outputs are considered, not only publications. (ARRA commitment 2)
- The Research Council has adopted the CV template of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, which makes researchers' research outputs visible in the review and decision-making process. (ARRA commitment 1)
- Applicants are asked to list the ten most relevant publications and ten other key outputs and to provide appropriate rationalisations. They are also asked to provide a complete list of publications. It is recognised that the types of outputs vary between disciplines. (ARRA commitments 1, 2)
- When applying for Academy Research Fellowships, applicants include in their applications a narrative section on merits and increased competencies. In the section, the applicants describe how the funding will support them in increasing their



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competencies and making significant career progress towards more demanding research positions and an established position in the national and international research community. (ARRA commitments 1, 2)

- Legitimate delays in publication and personal factors or other types of leave, part-time work and disabilities that may have affected the applicant's record of outputs are taken into account in the review and decision-making processes. (ARRA commitment 1)

Training, guidance and communication

In line with ARRA's commitments to facilitate mutual learning and facilitate the move towards new criteria, we provide training and guidance on responsible evaluation principles to our key stakeholders, applicants, reviewers (often researchers themselves) and decision-making bodies, and to our own administrative staff:

- [Review principles 2023](#) - guidelines for responsible review
- [CV guidelines \(general\)](#)
- [CV guidelines for Academy Research Fellowships](#)
- [Narrative CV guidelines - Merits and increased competencies](#)
- [List of publications guidelines](#)
- [Ask & Apply webinar series](#) - an annual webinar series for applicants.

We annually organise an instructive webinar on review principles and practices for reviewers. We have also regularly organised internal training and webinars for our decision-making bodies and officials.

We promote responsible assessment within the wider community by sharing information through our website and other communication channels.

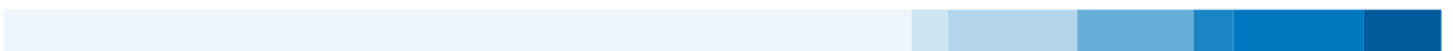
- [Responsible science at the Research Council of Finland](#)
- [Responsible researcher evaluation](#)
- [Increasing research diversity highlights the importance of responsible researcher evaluation](#) - blog article on responsible researcher assessment, published 22 Nov 2023 (23 Jan 2024 in English)

Networks

The Research Council of Finland participates in the Finnish National Chapter, which supports the entire Finnish research community in its journey towards a quality-focused assessment culture that recognises the full diversity and impact of academic work. We also participate in two CoARA working groups:

- Improving practices in the assessment of research proposals
- Multilingualism and language biases in research assessment.

In addition to CoARA, we are engaged in several national and international groups that actively advance the cultural change of research assessment reform, such as:





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- ERA Policy Action 3 on Reforming the assessment system for research, researchers, and institutions
- Science Europe, specifically working groups on Research culture and Open science
- Steering group on responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland.

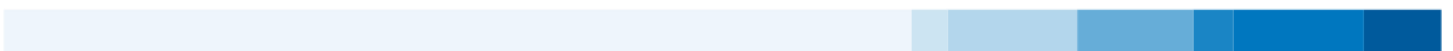
Monitoring and development

Our review processes, instructions and criteria are regularly reviewed and improved based on feedback and discussions with stakeholders and international sister organisations.

Through participation in the CoARA working group 'Multilingualism and language biases in research assessment, the Research Council has started to examine how to enhance linguistic equity and diversity in the assessment of both research funding applications and research results.

Resources

The Research Council of Finland has a core team responsible for the development of research assessment, allocating approximately 2 FTEs to these issues.



**Roadmap towards assessment reform 2019-2027**

2019-2020	2021	2022	2023	2024-2027
Signatory of DORA (2019)	Joins national steering group on responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland	Joins drafting process of ARRA	Joins CoARA working groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving practices in the assessment of research proposals - Multilingualism and language biases in research assessment 	Monitoring: feedback regularly collected from reviewers and applicants
Joins national working group on responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland (2018-2020)	Starts to implement responsible researcher assessment principles in funding process	Signatory of ARRA and joins CoARA	Joins CoARA Finnish National Chapter	Provides training and education to main actors
Signatory of Recommendation for the responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland (2020)	Opens a dedicated website: Responsible researcher evaluation	Academy research fellowships funding reform - pilots narrative CV	Publishes updated "Review principles" guidelines for reviewers	Active participation in national and international networks and working groups
Commitment and action plan to implement responsible researcher assessment principles in funding process (2020)				Regularly develops review criteria, information in applications and guidelines based on new knowledge and monitors results



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