



## Instructions for reviewing funding applications - Centre of Excellence Programme

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### 1. Objectives of the Research Council of Finland and the funding schemes

The Research Council of Finland's mission is to open up new avenues for excellent, responsible and high-impact research. Our objectives are to advance new scientific breakthroughs and solutions for the benefit of society; the capacity of research for renewal and reform; and better and higher-impact skills and competence. Our funding is based on open competition, independent peer review and responsible science. We grant funding to researchers and research teams as well as to the most promising early-career researchers through different funding instruments.



### **1.1. Centre of Excellence Programme**

A Centre of Excellence (CoE) is a research community that is already at or striving for the international cutting edge of research in its field. CoEs may consist of one or more research teams working closely together under a joint research plan.

The units selected as CoEs are scientifically first-rate research communities that have capacity for renewal and high societal impact. The CoE programmes contribute to the renewal of science by supplying new research topics, new methods and approaches, and new research teams. Thanks to the long-term funding provided in collaboration with CoE host organisations, the funding instrument effectively works as an incentive for risk-taking and new initiatives in research. Read more in the [call text](#).

## **2. Role of experts and the Research Council of Finland**

Experts are invited to review the scientific excellence of the applications in two stages. The experts are esteemed, mostly international researchers in the field of the applications concerned. The selection of projects from the first to the second stage and the funding decisions are made by the Research Council of Finland's decision-making bodies based on the scientific review and science policy factors of the Research Council and the subcommittees.

### **2.1. Individual reviewers (1<sup>st</sup>-stage and 2<sup>nd</sup>-stage evaluation) and panel members (2<sup>nd</sup>-stage evaluation)**

At the first stage of the evaluation, the experts act as individual reviewers. At the second stage, the experts act as individual reviewers and panel members. The duties of individual reviewers are to review and write review reports on the applications allocated to them. At the second stage of the evaluation, individual reviewers also participate in the panel as members. All panel members are expected to actively participate in the panel meeting.

At the first stage, applications will be allocated to at least three individual reviewers. At the second stage, applications will be allocated to at least two individual reviewers and possibly a reader in the panel review phase. The reader is asked to form an opinion of the application without writing a review. One of the reviewers will be a summariser in the panel meeting and will write the final panel summary review for the application.



## **2.2. Panels and panel chair (2<sup>nd</sup>-stage evaluation)**

Centre of Excellence panels consist of a chair, a possible vice chair and panel members representing the scope of the panel. The panel will evaluate all the applications assigned to it and rank them.

The duties of the chair are to chair the panel meeting via an online platform (Teams), lead the discussion and ensure that all applications are reviewed in a responsible and fair manner. The chair also has duties as a panel member.

## **2.3. Research Council of Finland officials**

The Research Council of Finland's officials invite the individual reviewers (1<sup>st</sup> stage), panel members and, if needed, additional external individual reviewers (2<sup>nd</sup> stage) to support the panel, provide instructions on the review process and organise instructive webinars and pre-panel meetings when relevant. The officials also take care of the practical arrangements in the panel meeting and follow that the review process is carried according to the Research Council's established procedures.

## **2.4. Decision-making bodies**

After the first stage of the evaluation, a subcommittee will decide which applications are invited to submit full proposals based on the review reports. In the second stage of the evaluation, the subcommittee will make the final funding decisions based on the panel review reports and panel rankings. The decisions are based on the peer review and the 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 and impact beyond academia.

# **3. Review and ranking**

## **3.1. Review criteria and rating scale**

The main criteria in the review are:

- scientific quality, novelty and innovativeness of the research as well as its impact within the scientific community
- feasibility of the research plan and the quality of research environment, including responsible science



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- competence of applicant
- human resources, expertise and collaborations including researcher mobility, and researcher training

**Written reviews:** Evaluative comments are particularly valuable to the decision-making bodies. Also, after the funding decisions have been made, the applicants will receive the individual reviews from both stages and the panel summary assessment including the names of the experts on their own applications. Written reviews play a crucial role in aiding decision-making bodies. In addition, they provide important feedback to applicants. Reviewers should therefore:

- write evaluative comments and give justifications using full sentences
- avoid descriptive comments and copying text directly from the application
- write comments and give subratings under each review item, taking into consideration the specific guidelines for each item (however, item "Review panel's summary assessment" in the second stage will be developed and finalised during the panel meeting)
- maintain coherence throughout their comments and give constructive feedback.

**Numerical rating:** The consistency between the numerical rating and the written comments is particularly important. The rating scale ranges from 6 (outstanding) to 1 (insufficient). At all levels of the review process, please pay close attention to the potential for breakthrough research.

Rating	Description
6 (outstanding)	Demonstrates extremely high novelty and/or innovation; has potential to substantially advance science at global level; presents a high-gain plan that may include risks
5 (excellent)	Is very good in international comparison - contains no significant elements to be improved
4 (good)	Is in general sound but contains some elements that should be improved
3 (fair)	Is in general sound but contains important elements that should be improved
2 (poor)	Contains flaws and needs substantial modification or improvement



1 (insufficient)	Contains severe flaws that are intrinsic to the proposed project or the application
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### 3.2. Individual review (1<sup>st</sup>-stage and 2<sup>nd</sup>-stage evaluation)

Each application is assigned to at least two-three individual reviewers. Reviewers write individual reviews, using specified sections in the review forms, and give subratings and overall ratings to the applications. The individual review reports will be given to the applicants as is, including the names of the reviewers. It is important to note that these reports provide important material for the decision-making bodies and valuable feedback for the applicants.

### 3.3. Review panel meeting (2<sup>nd</sup>-stage evaluation)

The panel members have access to all applications in the panel, with exceptions made in the case of conflicts of interest (see [Review principles PDF](#), section 1.3). Also, individual reviews for applications will be made available to all panel members at the latest one week before the meeting. However, please note that these review reports will only be made available to panel members once all review reports have been submitted to the Research Council.

At the panel meeting, the panel discusses all applications assigned to the panel. The panel also interviews applicants of each Centre of Excellence during the panel meeting. After the interview, the individual reviewers appointed to the application will present their opinion on the application and the interview. Typically, a third panel member (read-only/reader) may be assigned to read the application to form an additional, more general view of it. The review panel's summary assessment will be written for each application during the panel meeting by a dedicated summariser (a panel member). The summary is based on the discussions, the individual reviews, and the interview. The panel decides the final overall rating for each application. To complete the review, the panel is asked to rank all the applications. The applications are ranked based on the review criteria used and the instrument-specific objectives listed in the review forms – no additional criteria will be used.

### 3.4. How to review applications in the Research Council's online services

Please use the [Research Council of Finland's online services](#) (link takes you to the online services via our website) to review applications. You can find the review instructions and offline versions of all our review forms under [Guides for reviewers](#) on our website. Both individual reviews and panel review reports are completed in the online services. You can access the research plan or



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other sections in the application form directly from the review form questions. However, we do expect you to read the whole application.

### **4. Expert fees**

The expert fee for the first-stage evaluation is EUR 100 per review report. For the second-stage evaluation, there will be a modest compensation for participation, EUR 550 (EUR 700 for panel chair) per panel day (taxed as per your national taxation rules). This compensation also covers participation in a short pre-meeting. Furthermore, EUR 150 will be paid for each individual review.

To claim your fees, please enter your own personal banking details in the online services. The honorarium will be paid into your personal bank account. Please notice that IBAN is mandatory for bank accounts in Europe. Also fill in the BIC/SWIFT code/clearing code/routing number.

Make sure that you have entered your personal details correctly in the online services to avoid any unnecessary delays in the payment. The payslip will be sent to your home address.

