

Instructions for reviewing funding applications – Call for clinical research

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

The Research Council of Finland's (RCF) 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. Call for clinical research

This funding scheme is designed to promote ambitious clinical research by consortia composed of two or more research teams. The objectives of the call are to strengthen clinical research and generate new research knowledge to support social welfare and healthcare, disease treatment, diagnostics, prevention or



business activity. Also, an important objective is to increase collaboration between researchers between wellbeing services counties and other organisations. The research should be of a high quality, with a high scientific impact and wide impact beyond academia. For wide societal impact, there should be a clear plan for interaction with key actors in using research findings at different stages of the research project lifecycle.

The focus of the review should be on the scientific quality, the implementation of the research plan, the potential for achieving societal impact and the other specific objectives of the call. It is also important to pay attention to the expected added value of the consortium and the potential to increase collaboration between consortium partners. The funding is applied for to employ research teams and cover research costs.

2. Role of experts and the RCF

Experts are invited to review the scientific excellence of the applications. The experts are esteemed, mostly international researchers in the field of the applications concerned. The funding decisions are made by the RCF's decision-making bodies based on the scientific review and the science policy of the RCF and its scientific councils or subcommittees.

2.1. Panel chair

The review panel is assigned a chair from among the panel members. 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. After the panel meeting the chair is expected to deliver a brief memorandum including feedback on the review process and the panel meeting.

2.2. Individual reviewers and panel members

Experts may act as individual reviewers and panel members. The duties of individual reviewers are to review and write review reports of the applications allocated to them. As a rule, individual reviewers also participate in the panel as members. All panel members are expected to actively participate in the panel meeting.

Applications will be allocated to at least two individual reviewers and/or 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.



2.3. Panels

All applications submitted to the call for clinical research will be evaluated in the same panel. The panel consists of a chair, a possible vice chair and panel members representing the scope of the panel.

2.4. RCF officials

The RCF's officials invite the panel members and, if needed, additional external individual reviewers to support the panel, provide instructions on the review process and organise a pre-panel meeting when relevant. The officials also take care of the practical arrangements in the panel meeting and ensure that the review process follows established RCF procedures.

2.5. Decision-making bodies

After the scientific review, the funding decisions are made by a subcommittee for the RCF's thematic calls. The decisions are based on the peer review and the panel ranking, taking into account the specific objectives of the call.

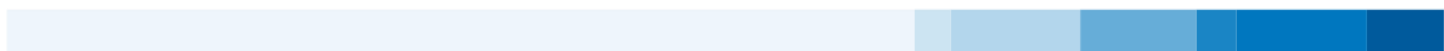
3. Review and ranking

3.1. Review criteria and rating scale

The main criteria in the review are:

- contribution of application to achieving objectives of call, including societal impact
- scientific quality, novelty and innovativeness of research as well as its impact within scientific community
- feasibility of research plan and quality of research environment, including responsible science (research ethics, equality and nondiscrimination, open science, sustainable development)
- competence of applicant and research team
- expected added value of consortium and potential to increase collaboration between consortium partners
- human resources, expertise and collaborations.

Written reviews: Please note that, after the funding decisions have been made, the applicants will receive the individual reviews and the panel summary assessment including the names of the experts on their own applications. Evaluative comments are particularly valuable to the decision-making bodies.





Written reviews play a crucial role in aiding the 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” 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

* Below threshold for panel discussion if all individual overall ratings are below 4

3.2. Individual review

Each application is assigned to at least two individual reviewers. Reviewers write individual reviews, using specified sections in the review forms, and give sub- and overall ratings to the applications. Applications given an overall rating of 5 or 6 from at least one reviewer will continue to the panel review phase. The other applications will continue directly to the decision-making process. Therefore, the deadline for submitting the individual review reports is strict. It supports the preparation of the panel meeting following the individual review phase. 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 (online)

The panel members have access to all applications submitted to the panel, excluding conflicts of interest (see Review principles, section 1.3). Also, individual reviews for applications continuing to the panel review phase 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 RCF.

In the panel meeting, the panel discusses applications that reached the panel review phase. The individual reviewers appointed to the application will present their opinion on the application and, 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 and the individual reviews. The panel decides the final overall rating for each application. When the final overall rating is 5 or 6, also subratings for specified review criteria will be decided by the panel. To complete the review, the panel is asked to rank the applications rated 5 or 6. 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 RCF'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 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

There will be a modest compensation for participation, EUR 460 (EUR 600 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 100 will be paid for each individual review.



Research Council of Finland

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.

