Research Council of Finland

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Review principles

Contents

In all our research funding, we are committed to following responsible procedures with regard to conflicts of interest and disqualification, secrecy and responsible science, that is, equality and nondiscrimination, research ethics, open science, sustainable development and responsible research assessment.

1. Code of conduct for review

1.1. Responsible researcher evaluation

The Research Council of Finland has signed the Agreement on reforming research assessment (PDF) and is a member of CoARA, the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment, and we are committed to implementing its four core commitments in the review of applications. We are also committed to following Finland's national recommendation on good practice in researcher evaluation (PDF) and are a signatory of DORA (link takes you to DORA's website), the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. We adhere to these commitments in our peer-review processes.

Agreement on reforming research assessment – four core commitments:

1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research
2. Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators
3. Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index
4. Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment

When reviewing the competence of the applicant, 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. 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. Please note also that other 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. Applicants are not allowed to include any journal-based metrics or other citation metrics in their application.

When assessing researchers' merits and their competence in delivering the proposed project, you are asked to consider the value and impact of all relevant outputs, not only publications. In their applications, 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. The types of outputs vary between disciplines.

In applications for Academy Research Fellowships, you will also find a narrative-like section in the CV, which facilitates the review of the competence, expected achievements and potential of the applicant according to the objectives of the funding instrument.

You are also asked to be sensitive to legitimate delays in publication and personal factors or other types of leave, diverse career paths, part-time work and disabilities that may have affected the applicant's record of outputs. Read more about responsible researcher evaluation on our website.

1.2. Secrecy and integrity in the review process

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

The Research Council of Finland is committed to following the Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland (PDF). 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. Advance 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. This also applies to entering the information in AI tools such as ChatGPT (see also the European research integrity guidelines (PDF) on the use of AI tools in research or review). In addition, you are not allowed to use secret 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 RCF. Disclosing the contents of research plans to third parties or contacting applicants personally without explicit agreement to do so are 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. In addition, the Finnish Criminal Code provides for the punishability of breaches of the obligation to maintain the secrecy of a document kept secret under the Act on the Openness of Government Activities and breaches of the nondisclosure obligation and the prohibition of use.

Reviewers are guilty of research misconduct if they misappropriate research ideas, results, observations or data from applications. This also includes copying any part of an application. 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.

After the funding decisions have been made, the RCF will publish on its website a list of panels and (with permission) the names of the panel members including their current positions and institutions as well as the names of all individual reviewers enlisted in the call. If requested, this information will be disclosed already after the panel meeting.

The applicants will see the names of reviewers in the individual review reports. In addition, if the application is also reviewed in a panel, the names of all panel members will be disclosed in the review report.

Confidentiality must also be maintained after the review process has been completed. Application review involves secret documents, but applicants will have access to the review reports on their applications after the funding decisions have been made. An applicant shall not disclose to third parties secret information obtained on the basis of party status and concerning other persons than the party themself.

The Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities also applies to the applicant, and this is explained in the decision that the applicant will receive together with the reviewers' or panel's statement.

As a rule, the review report is a secret document under the Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999). As a party, you will receive the review report on your application, which is not in the public domain, because the report has affected the processing of your application (section 11.1 of the Act). If the review report contains secret content other than content concerning yourself, you may not disclose it to a third party (section 23.2). Nor may you use such secret information for your own personal benefit or the benefit of another, nor for the detriment of another, with the exception provided for in the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (section 23.3). These prohibitions also apply to a party's representative or counsel. NB! This does not apply to funding schemes where the review material is in the public domain (e.g. Profi funding) or where review reports have not been used to support decision-making.

The review report includes the name of the reviewer. Under the GDPR, publication or otherwise unauthorized disclosure of personal data without specific consent from the data subject is prohibited. In addition, according to the RCF's guidelines on the review and decision-making processes, contacting reviewers is prohibited.

In **Strategic Research Council calls,** where draft reviews are part of the process, the draft reviews and the names of reviewers who have supplied the draft reviews will also be disclosed to the applicant if requested (under the Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities). The possible draft reviews are also secret documents unless otherwise stated in the applicable legislation or required by court order.

In (certain) calls targeted to organisations, like **Funding to strengthen university research profiles**, applications, review reports, ratings and rankings are made public on request.

1.3. 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 or been involved in the preparation of the application).
- You are a superior, subordinate or instructor of the applicant.
- You are applying for the same post as the applicant.
- You are applying for funding from the Research Council 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 regarding the applicant or application.

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

2. 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 1.2 above (Secrecy and integrity in the review process). Further, you affirm that you will

immediately notify the Research Council if you have a conflict of interest in one or more applications.

3. Responsible science in research

3.1. Research ethics

The Research Council of Finland requires that the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity guidelines Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland (PDF) are followed in all RCF-funded research. We also require that researchers follow ALLEA's (All European Academies) European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (PDF) when engaging in international collaboration. The same guidelines also oblige researchers in their work abroad.

Researchers applying for funding from the RCF have to describe the ethical issues related to their research in their application. If the research project involves, for example, ethical questions related to the processing of personal data, the use of experimental animals and use or development of dual use products, the responsible researcher must explain in sufficient detail in their application how these have been taken into account.

We 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. Read more about the ethical questions on our website.

3.2. Equality and nondiscrimination

The Research Council of Finland's research funding promotes equality and nondiscrimination as part of responsible science. To secure responsible reviews and decision-making, we are, in accordance with our Equality and nondiscrimination plan (link takes you to our website), 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 certain leaves (maternity, paternity, parental or childcare leave, or military or nonmilitary service, other special reasons, such as long-term illness) cannot be evaluated negatively in the evaluation process.

The RCF requires that all research we fund promote gender equality and nondiscrimination. Our reviews and decision-making emphasise the importance of promoting equality and nondiscrimination 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, we ask 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.

3.3. Open science

The Research Council 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 our open science policy on our website.

The RCF is a member of cOAlition S and uses Plan S principles and practices in its funding guidelines. In addition, we apply the National Policy for Open Access to Scholarly Publications. When reviewing publication plans, reviewers are asked to take note of our open access policy and value the applicants' efforts to publish in OA journals or use other alternatives that secure the immediate open access of articles. All peer-reviewed articles written in RCF-funded projects should be published with immediate open access. Researchers may use OA journals, platforms, repositories or journals that commit to full OA by 2024.

When reviewing applicants' preliminary presentations on data management and open access to research data, reviewers are asked to take note of the RCF research data policy and value the applicants' efforts 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 will be collected or gives understandable reasons for not opening the research data. The funded projects submit a full research data management plan after a positive funding decision.

3.4. Sustainable development

The Research Council of Finland is committed to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has made its own commitment to Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development for 2022–2025. By this commitment, our aim is to raise awareness of the principles of sustainable development and to

emphasise the importance of these principles in research funding and research work.

In their research plans, researchers are encouraged to describe how the project promotes one or more of 17 sustainable development goals, and how sustainable development is taken into account in the project's implementation.

Although not a criterion in the scientific review of applications, sustainable development is one of the science policy objectives that factors in RCF funding decisions. Thus, we encourage reviewers to comment on how the project incorporates sustainable development.

Read more about our commitment to sustainable development on our website.

