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# INSTRUCTIONS FOR REVIEWING FUNDING APPLICATIONS – INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS

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## APPENDIX 1: FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

### 1 ROLE OF EXPERTS AND THE ACADEMY OF FINLAND

The Academy of Finland funds cutting-edge and innovative research aiming at significant scientific breakthroughs. Our funding is based on open competition and independent peer review. The Academy 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 funding applications. In most cases, the applications are reviewed in expert panels, however external reviews may be used to support panel review or independently.

After receiving the reviews, decision-making bodies (research councils or subcommittees) make the final funding decisions. The decisions are based on a peer review of scientific quality (and in a case of panel review, 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, the advancement of junior researchers' careers, and impact beyond academia.

### 2 REVIEW

#### Reviewing funding 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 panel review report on their own application. The review also provides the applicant with important feedback. Reviewers should therefore:

- give evaluative comments rather than descriptive phrases (avoid copying text from the application directly)
- write comments under each sub-item
- in case of an external review supporting panel review: write coherent phrases (in passive) that can be used, if agreed, as such in the panel review report.



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 project that may 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.

## Items to be reviewed

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

### 1 Quality of research plan

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| Scientific quality and innovativeness of research plan   | (rating 1–6)          |
| · See item 1, all sections in the research plan  |                       |
| Implementation of research plan  | (rating 1–6)          |
| · See item 2, all sections in the research plan  |                       |
| Research consortium  | (no numerical rating) |
| · In case you are reviewing consortium applications, there is a sub-item concerning the added value of the consortium. A consortium is a more integrated form of a research project than research collaboration between two or more independent research projects. A consortium application is reviewed as a single application.   |                       |
| · See item 2.4 in the research plan  |                       |
| Responsible science  | (no numerical rating) |
| · See item 4, all sections in the research plan  |                       |
| · See also attached data management plan   |                       |
| · <i>The Academy of Finland is committed to following the guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity for responsible conduct of research.</i>  |                       |
| · <i>The Academy is committed to promoting the practices outlined in Finland's national Open Science and Research Roadmap 2014–2017. 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.</i> |                       |



## 2 Competence of applicant(s), quality of research collaborations

Competence and expertise of applicant(s) and the research team

(rating 1–6)

- See item 3.1 in the research plan
- See also attached CV(s) and list(s) of publications
- In case you are reviewing consortium applications, competence of all principal investigators should be reviewed.
- In case you are reviewing applications for, for example, Postdoctoral Researcher funding, the research team is not reviewed.

Significance of research collaborations and researcher mobility

(rating 1–6)

- See item 3.2 in the research plan
- See Mobility section in the application form
- In case you are reviewing applications for, for example, Postdoctoral Researcher funding or Academy Research Fellow funding, there is a separate sub-item concerning the researcher's mobility.

## 3 Project's relevance (if applicable)

Project's relevance to the programme/call

(rating 1–6)

- In case you are reviewing applications for Academy Programme funding, Targeted Academy Project funding or Joint Projects, there is an item concerning the project's relevance to the programme or call
- See all sections of the research plan and special item 1.4 in the research plan

## 4 Overall assessment and final rating

Main strengths and weaknesses of the project, additional comments and suggestions

(no numerical rating)

- *Please give an overall assessment for the application including lists of strengths and weaknesses as well as any additional comments. It is important to comment on both the strengths and the weaknesses of the application.*
- *You are also encouraged to comment on the societal effects and impact, including principles of sustainable development, see item 5 in research plan. However, these should not affect the scientific review/rating or ranking of the application. Instead, they will be considered as an additional factor when making the funding decisions.*

Final rating

(rating 1–6)

- *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 (e.g. lack of some expertise in local team, but obtained through international collaboration).*

### 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 draft reviews and panel review reports are completed in the online services. You can find the review instructions and all our review



forms for current calls at <http://www.aka.fi/en/review-and-funding-decisions/how-applications-are-reviewed/guides-for-reviewers/>.

### 3 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 reviews 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 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, or return them to the Academy. Confidentiality must also be maintained after the review process has been completed. The applicants will have access to the review report 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, current positions and institutions of all individual reviewers and panel members used in the call. In addition, the applicant will see the name of the reviewer in the review report on their own application (Act on the Openness of Government Activities).

### 4 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

As a reviewer you are required to declare any personal interests according to the following criteria. 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.

#### 5 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 stated in section 3 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 regarded as 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 for 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.

