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# INSTRUCTIONS FOR REVIEWING RESEARCH APPLICATIONS – INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS

## CONTENTS

- 1 ROLE OF EXPERTS AND THE ACADEMY OF FINLAND
- 2 EVALUATION
- 3 CONFIDENTIALITY
- 4 CONFLICT OF INTEREST
- 5 DECLARATION

## APPENDIX 1: FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

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

The Academy of Finland 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 research applications.

After receiving the reviews, members of the Academy's research councils, or in some cases steering committees, rank the applications. These decision-making bodies make the final funding decisions. The decisions are based on a peer review of scientific quality, but factors related to science policy may also influence the decisions. Examples of such factors are the promotion of equal opportunities for both genders, the advancement of junior researchers' careers, as well as the economic, environmental, societal and technological impacts of research.

### 2 EVALUATION

#### 2.1 Reviewing research 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 final review on their own application. The review provides also the applicant with important feedback. Reviewers should therefore:

- give evaluative comments rather than descriptive phrases
- write comments for each sub-item
- write coherent phrases.

**NUMERICAL EVALUATION:** Please grade all sub-items as well as Item 1 (Research plan) and Item 2 (Competence of applicant(s), quality of research collaborations). There should be consistency between the numerical rating and the written comments. Please rate the application using the scale below:

6 = outstanding: Demonstrates exceptional novelty and innovation. Potential to substantially advance science at global level. High gain projects that can 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.

OVERALL ASSESMENT: Please give a final rating and an overall assessment for the application including the strengths and weaknesses as well as any additional comments. The final rating should not be a mathematical average of the sub-ratings. It is important to comment on both the strengths and the weaknesses of the application.

## 2.2 Items of evaluation

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

### 1 Research plan (rating 1–6)

- 1.1 Scientific quality and innovativeness of research plan (sub-rating 1–6)
- 1.2 Feasibility of research plan (sub-rating 1–6)
- 1.3 Ethical issues (no numerical rating)

If you are reviewing applications for Academy Research Programmes, Targeted Academy Projects or Joint Projects, there is an additional sub-item concerning the project's relevance to the programme or call.

### 2 Competence of applicant(s), quality of research collaborations (rating 1–6)

- 2.1 Competence and expertise of applicant(s) (sub-rating 1–6)
- 2.2 Research team, significance of research collaborations (sub-rating 1–6)
- 2.3 Researcher mobility (sub-rating 1–6)
- 2.4 Research consortium (if applicable; no numerical rating)

## 2.3 Reviewing consortium projects

Project funding may also be applied for by a consortium of several applicants working typically at different sites. A consortium is a more integrated form of a research project than research collaboration between two or more independent research projects, because a consortium project has a common abstract, research plan and public description. Besides the common elements of the application, the application of the consortium must also include the budgets, lists of publications and curricula vitae for the principal investigators of the sub-projects participating in the consortium.

A consortium application is reviewed as a single application. In the review report, the joint research plan and the competence of all principal investigators should be discussed, as well as the added value of the consortium for the attainment of the objectives of the whole project (cf. evaluation item 2.4).

## 2.4 How to review applications in the online services

To review applications, please use the online services available on our website. You can find review instructions and all our evaluation forms for current calls at: <http://www.aka.fi/en/review-and-funding-decisions/how-applications-are-reviewed/guides-for-reviewers/>.

## 3 CONFIDENTIALITY

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.

As a reviewer, you are not allowed to disclose any information concerning application documents or evaluations 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.

Once the evaluation 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 evaluation process has been completed.

Reviews are confidential documents, but applicants will have access to the final review on their own application after the funding decisions have been made. The evaluations are made available to the applicant without the reviewer's name, but on request, applicants are entitled to know the evaluator's name.

## 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 stipulated in section 3 above (Confidentiality). 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 advance the professional competence of the most promising researchers who have recently completed their doctoral degree. Postdoctoral Researchers are encouraged to international mobility and collaboration as well as to national and cross-sectoral mobility.

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. The aim of the funding is to provide an opportunity for the best advanced researchers 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 medical doctors working in clinical practice to engage in research so that they can continue to pursue their research career while in specialist training and, upon completion of that training, alongside with clinical practice.

The applicant is a clinical researcher 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.

#### Academy Professors (5-year funding)

The aim of the funding is to facilitate full-time scientific research for internationally leading-edge researchers. Academy Professors are expected to greatly contribute to the progress of research and develop a creative research environment. Their duties also include (without separate compensation) supervision of thesis and dissertation writers and teaching associated with the research, covering 5 per cent of the annual working hours.

## 2 FUNDING FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS

### Academy Projects (4-year funding)

An Academy Project is the Academy of Finland's key funding opportunity, designed to promote the quality and diversity of research and its capacity for renewal. The funding provides researchers with an opportunity to carry out scientifically ambitious research, to achieve new breakthroughs and to engage in high-risk research. The aim is to attain internationally as high a scientific standard of work as possible and to strengthen the creativity, effectiveness and impact of research. We also encourage researchers to draft ambitious research plans that cross discipline boundaries and aim at scientific breakthroughs.

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), securing breakthrough research, promoting the internationalisation of research or supporting Strategic Centres for Science, Technology and Innovation.

### Joint projects (2–4-year funding)

Joints project funding is Targeted Academy Project funding that is targeted for example at international calls for joint projects with foreign funding agencies.

### Academy Research programmes (4-year funding)

Academy research programmes are composed of a number of closely related projects in the same field of research or addressing a specified theme. The general aim is to produce knowledge in the field or problems specified in the Research Programme Memorandum, to raise the overall quality of research, to promote interdisciplinarity and international cooperation, to establish and strengthen the knowledge base within the field concerned, to promote research careers and networking among researchers and to intensify researcher training. Research programmes aim at generating substantial added value when compared to funding projects in the general call.