

# THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND HANDBOOK FOR APPLICANTS, EXPERT PANELS AND EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

2016

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## 1 PREFACE

This is the first edition of The Icelandic Research Fund (IRF) handbook for applicants, expert panels and external reviewers. The objective is to increase the transparency of the process for all parties involved in IRF's activities. The handbook also contains the fund's rules and describes procedures and obligations for grant recipients. The handbook is issued in connection with the IRF annual call. For the document to serve its purpose, applicants, expert panel members and external reviewers are urged to review the entire document.

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## PART I – GENERAL INFORMATION

### 2 GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND

#### 2.1 THE ROLE OF THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND

The Icelandic Research Fund (IRF) is an open competitive research fund that operates according to the [Act on Public Support for Scientific Research](#) (no. 3/2003 with later amendments)<sup>1</sup>. The role aim of the fund is to enhance scientific research and research education in Iceland. For that purpose the IRF awards funding to research projects led by individuals, research teams, universities, research institutes, and organisations according to the general priorities of the Science and Technology Policy Council<sup>2</sup> based on peer review of the quality of the proposed research projects, the capability of the researchers, and the available research facilities.

#### 2.2 THE BOARD OF THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture appoints a five member Board for a period of three years following nominations by the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council. When appointed, the names of the Board members are published on the Rannís website. The Board issues rules and guidelines and makes

funding decisions based on evaluations by expert panels. General questions regarding the Fund and proposals under review are handled by Rannís staff.

#### 2.3 GRANTS MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Rannís staff provide support and advice on grant-related queries. Rannís hours are, 9:00-16:00, Monday-Friday.

#### 2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN HANDLING APPLICATIONS

Members of the IRF Board, members of expert panels, external reviewers, programme officers and others handling applications to the IRF are bound by strict confidentiality. Proposals, including all enclosed materials and review sheets are considered confidential information. The confidential information is not to be used for any other purpose than the review process and may not be disclosed, published or otherwise revealed to any other party. No copies of any confidential information shall be made available in any media, except for the purposes of the review. After completion of the review, a copy of the application and final review sheet will be stored in the Rannís registry, and all other confidential information shall be destroyed. IRF expert panel members understand and acknowledge that any disclosure or misappropriation of any of the confidential information may cause the owner irreparable harm. The owner of the confidential information has the right to apply to a court of competent jurisdiction for specific performance and/or an order restraining and enjoining any such further disclosure or breach and for such other relief as the owner shall deem appropriate. Such right of owner is to be in addition to remedies otherwise available to owner at law or in equity.

#### 2.5 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

In the event of conflict of interest, external reviewers, expert panel members or Board members must recuse themselves from assessment of a proposal. Expert panel members and Board members shall not be present for discussions or decisions regarding a proposal when conflicts of

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<sup>1</sup> In Icelandic

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.vt.is/>

interest arise. This shall be documented in the meeting minutes. In addition to grounds for disqualification as listed in the Administration Procedure Act (no. 37/1993)<sup>3</sup> the following leads to disqualification of external reviewers, expert panel members and Board members of the IRF:

- Publishing of scientific articles within 5 years from the start of the grant year with a participant in a grant proposal.
- Personal conflicts between a panel member, Board member or external reviewer and an applicant.
- If a panel member, Board member or external reviewer is a spouse, close relative or close friend of the applicant of a grant proposal.
- Panel members cannot be principal investigators of a proposal to the IRF.
- If a Board member is a participant in a grant proposal. The interested Board member is asked to resign from his/her position in the affiliate and a deputy board member will take his/her place.
- If a panel member or Board member is a professional competitor of the applicant.

Disqualification on grounds of conflict of interest of a panel member or a Board member who is employed at the same institution or company as an applicant depends on the closeness of their relationship. This does not automatically lead to disqualification.

Board members, expert panel members and external reviewers are responsible for identifying circumstances that might influence their judgment of proposals, thus ensuring that conflicts of interest will not arise.

## 2.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR APPLICANTS

The applicant should always detail in the application if questions of ethical conduct of research are likely

to arise over the course of the project. If the applicant believes that questions of ethical conduct of research are likely to arise for the project, the ethical issues in question and the way they will be handled shall be explicitly described in the application. When appropriate, consent must also be obtained from relevant research ethics panel<sup>4</sup>. If consent is needed and has not been approved when the application is submitted, it should be specifically noted in the application.

When appropriate, the applicant must observe international agreements and contracts regulating access to, utilization of, and exchange of biological material for research purposes, as well as intellectual property.

## 2.7 RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

Should suspicion of research misconduct, fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misappropriation by the principal investigator of an application or a funded project arise during the review process, during the funding period, or after the funding period of the project, the principal investigator's institution, as well as the IRF Board, will be notified, without exception.

Suspicion of research misconduct during the review phase will result in withdrawal of an application from the review process while the principal investigator's institution is given opportunity to conduct an investigation. Should allegations of research misconduct be found to be baseless, the application will be reviewed following standard review procedures. If research misconduct is confirmed the application will be rejected without a review and the principal investigator's institute made responsible for taking appropriate actions.

The IRF Board may decide to initiate an independent investigation into cases of research misconduct.

<sup>3</sup> <http://eng.forsaetisraduneyti.is/acts-of-law/nr/17>

<sup>4</sup> The National Bioethics Committee ([visindasidanefnd.is](http://visindasidanefnd.is)), The Data Protection Authority ([personuvernd.is](http://personuvernd.is)), Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority ([mast.is](http://mast.is))

Research misconduct discovered during the application phase or during or after the funding period will be reported to the principal investigator's institution and the Board of the IRF. The Board of the IRF may demand that the principal investigator repay the grant funds obtained to that point, and decide on specific restrictions regarding future submissions.

Applicants are advised to carefully read section 5 *The review process*, section 6 *The Expert panel guidelines*, and section 7 *The External review-guidelines*, where the evaluation criteria used by the expert panels and external reviewers are described. It should be especially noted that reviews are completed solely based on information provided in the applications themselves.

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## PART II - APPLICANTS

### 3 GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

#### 3.1 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Principal investigators must have completed their graduate studies at an internationally accredited university.

Applicants for postdoctoral fellowships must have been awarded a doctoral degree within the past seven years before the grant application deadline. A copy of the doctoral degree certificate shall accompany the proposal. Special circumstances, such as parental leave or illnesses that prevented research activities after the degree was received specified in the applicant CV, may be considered as grounds for exceptions to this rule.

Applicants for a doctoral student grant must have been accepted into the doctoral programme at the time of submission deadline.

International research collaboration and industrial partners are welcomed in applications. Grants can, however, only be administered by Icelandic universities, research institutes, and companies.

Proposals must meet all stated eligibility criteria in order to be reviewed. If it becomes clear before, during or after the peer review evaluation phase, that one or more of the eligibility criteria have not been met, the proposal is declared ineligible and is withdrawn from any further examination.

#### 3.2 EVALUATION OF NEW PROPOSALS

In the application form, the applicants select the expert panel in which they wish the proposal to be evaluated. Rannís staff may suggest a different panel for a proposal, but no proposal is transferred between panels without explicit prior consent from the principal investigator.

#### 3.3 GRANTS AWARDED

Grants awarded are published on the Rannís website and can be searched [online](#)<sup>5</sup>.

##### 3.3.1 DISTRIBUTION OF ANNUAL PAYMENTS OF GRANTED PROJECTS

- First payment (80%) upon signing the grant agreement.
- Final payment (20%) upon approval of the annual/final report.

##### 3.3.2 REPORTING OF GRANTED PROJECTS

The principal investigator is responsible for submitting an annual report by January 10th following each grant year, and a final report within one year of the conclusion of the project. The reports are reviewed by Rannís staff who makes recommendations on continued support to the IRF Board. The Rannís staff member designated to a given grant has the authority to request further information from grantees upon review of the report and consult the respective expert panel if deemed necessary. The final payment, 20% of the annual sum, is paid upon approval of the report. If the report is not approved, the Board can withdraw the grant and request that the grantee repay the sum already paid to the project. Forms for annual and final reports can be found on the [Rannís website](#).

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<sup>5</sup> In Icelandic

### Annual reports

In the annual report, costs and finances based on the previous year's budget and a cost estimate for the following grant year shall be submitted. All important changes in project costs shall be detailed, and any deviations from the research plan must be clearly justified. Transfer of funds between cost items exceeding 20% of the total grant requires prior approval of the IRF Board.

### Final reports

Upon the conclusion of the funded project, the grantee shall submit a final report detailing the work completed as part of the project, its final results, and conclusions. A detailed budget overview on total costs and finances shall accompany the final report. Any differences between planned budget and actual cost of the project must be explained in the final report.

### 3.3.3 OPEN ACCESS TO RESULTS

According to the Act on Public Support for Scientific Research no. 3/2003 with later amendments, results of research funded by public funds shall be published in open access, unless otherwise agreed upon. Researchers who receive funding from IRF must guarantee that their research findings will be available through open access. Researchers may either publish in journals with an open access practice, or in open searchable, digital repositories along with the publication in a traditional subscription journal<sup>6</sup>. The final peer reviewed manuscript shall be returned to the repository immediately after the article has been accepted for publication. If the journal demands a waiting period prior to open access, the grantee shall upon submission of manuscript to repository specify that the the article shall be made available for public acces automatically when the waiting period expires.

The rules on open access currently only apply to peer-reviewed texts published in scientific journals.

Grantees are to explicitly reference the grant number and state that the project was funded by

the Icelandic Research Fund in any publications arising from the project by and.

## 4 ANNUAL CALL 2016

### 4.1 TIME FRAME OF THE CALL

The call for grant applications to the IRF is announced on the Rannís website 6 weeks before the deadline. The time frame of the call is described in Figure 1.

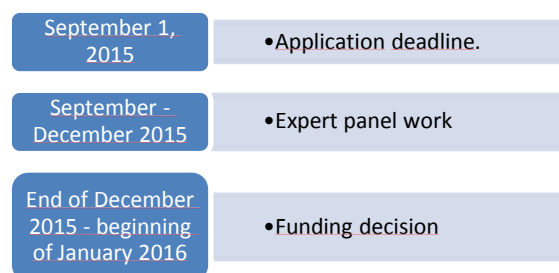


Figure 1. The time frame of the annual call.

### 4.2 TYPES OF GRANTS

In the annual call for the grant year 2016, there are four grant types; Grant of Excellence, Project grant, Postdoctoral fellowship grant and Doctoral student grant. These grants are awarded for up to three years (Table 1).

- A fairly even cost distribution is expected from one grant year to the next.
- The same individual may apply for any number of grants as a PI, provided that applications are for appreciably different projects. The PI must detail how research questions differ across the PI's different proposals.
- Funds from the IRF may be used for co-funding of international research projects with a similar focus.

Table 1. Grant types and maximum amount that can be applied for in the annual call.

Grant type	Maximum amount (ISK)
Grant of excellence	120.000.000
Project grant	45.000.000
Postdoctoral fellowship grant	21.000.000
Doctoral student grant	14.438.000

<sup>6</sup> For further information contact Rannís

#### 4.2.1 GRANT OF EXCELLENCE

Grants of excellence are awarded to large-scale projects with the aim to carry Icelandic research to the international forefront. The grants are for research groups, and thus co-applicants are required in addition to the principal investigator. The project should involve contributions by a graduate students or students, as well as international collaboration. The maximum grant amount for Grants of excellence is ISK 120 million for a 36-month project, ISK 80 million for a 24-month project, and ISK 40 million for a 12-month project. The Grant of excellence may fund up to 85% of the total cost of the project.

#### 4.2.2 PROJECT GRANT

The maximum grant amount in Project grants is ISK 45 million for a 36-month project, ISK 30 million for a 24-month project, and ISK 15 million for a 12-month project. The Project may fund up to 85% of the total cost of the project.

#### 4.2.3 POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP GRANT

The purpose of the Postdoctoral fellowship grant is to help young researchers (up to seven years post-Ph.D. graduation) to develop their academic careers. The eligible applicant must have obtained an invitation from a host institution, preferably different from the institution awarding the Ph.D. degree, prior to the submission deadline. The maximum grant amount for postdoctoral fellowships is ISK 21 million for a 36-month project, ISK 14 million for a 24-month project, and ISK 7 million for a 12-month project. The Postdoctoral fellowship grant may fund up to 100% of the total project cost. The applicant must explain how the fellowship fits with previous work of applicant, how it will enhance his/her career development, and provide information about future research plans after the grant period.

#### 4.2.4 DOCTORAL STUDENT GRANTS

Doctoral students can apply for grants covering only their salaries, and travel cost for up to 300,000 ISK per grant year. All other costs in relation to the project must be covered by the supervisor/institution. Note that salaries for Ph.D. students can also be applied for in Project grant proposals and Grant of excellence proposals. If

salaries are funded through more than one grant mechanism simultaneously, the same student cannot receive funding for more than 12 man-months per year. The grade degree must be awarded by an Icelandic University, but a joint degree with a foreign University is also allowed. Projects for up to 3 years can be funded, with a possible one-year extension.

### 4.3 ELIGIBLE COST

#### 4.3.1 SALARIES

Grants can be used to fund salaries of researchers, graduate students and technical staff. Participating researchers may be unnamed at time of proposal, but work assignments for all persons involved in the project must be detailed in the budget. For maximum salaries, including related expenses per month and the total number of months per person approved by the IRF, see Table 2. IRF salaries increase by 3% annually. IRF awards may not be used to augment the total salary of those who are simultaneously receiving full pay for other work (including pension). IRF awards may not be used for compensation during maternal or medical leave.

**Table 2. Maximum salaries, including related expenses per month and the total number of months per person, approved by the IRF as project cost for the grant year 2016.**

Position	Salaries per month (ISK)	Number of months per person
<b>Senior personnel 1 (e.g. full professor)</b>	730.000	Up to 36 months
<b>Senior personnel 2 (e.g. associate professor)</b>	695.000	Up to 36 months
<b>Senior personnel 3 (e.g. assistant professor)</b>	605.000	Up to 36 months
<b>Postdoctoral researcher</b>	480.000	Up to 36 months
<b>Researcher</b>	365.000	Up to 36 months
<b>Doctoral student</b>	365.000	Up to 36 months
<b>Masters student</b>	330.000	Up to 12 months



#### 4.3.2 OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

This item consists of the total sum of all the necessary supplies for the project, with the exception of items coming under contracted services, overhead, and facilities. Operational expenses, and their relation to the proposed activities, must be justified in detail on the electronic proposal form, and when appropriate, with price quotes attached. Note that all unexplained cost will be rejected. Equipment for up to ISK 2 million can be included in the proposal for the total project period. Proposals for costly instruments and equipment shall be submitted to the Infrastructure fund, and not to funds described in this Handbook.

#### 4.3.3 TRAVEL EXPENSES

This item consists of the total sum of travel and per diem expenses necessary for the progress of the project. All travel expenses must be justified and their relation to the project goal clearly explained.

#### 4.3.4 CONTRACTED SERVICES

This item contains work not carried out by the participants in the project, which is necessary for the project's progress such as, access to research infrastructures. Publication cost for up to ISK 500,000 can be applied for during the project period. Contracted services and their relation to the proposed activities must be justified in detail on the electronic proposal form and price quotes must be attached. No overhead can be claimed for contracted services.

#### 4.3.5 OVERHEAD AND FACILITIES

Applicant can apply for funding for financing overhead and facilities for up to 25% on top of total cost of the project, excluding contracted services and equipment cost.

### 4.4 WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE APPLICATION

Appendices A and B must be submitted without exceptions, and appendices C-G must be submitted where appropriate. A specific format for appendix A is available at the Rannís website.

The review of the proposal will solely be based on the application and relevant accompanying

appendices. Proposals not using the specific format for appendix A will be rejected. Incomplete proposals can be rejected at any time in the review process. No documents are accepted after the closing of the application deadline.

All proposals must be submitted through the Rannís electronic proposal system. Instructions are available on the Rannís website.

#### **Appendix A. Project description**

A specific form for appendix A is available on the Rannís website. The form is divided into predefined sections, which shall not be altered. When all information has been entered, applicants are asked to separate appendix A into two documents: 1) *Project description*, and 2) *Bibliography*, and then upload the two documents separately as pdf files. In the electronic proposal system, a page count is performed. The page limit (Times/Times New Roman 12 pt. font with 1.5 line spacing) for the *Project description* section of the application (including title page and guidelines) is 22 pages for Grant of excellence applications; 17 pages for Project grant applications; 14 pages for Postdoctoral fellowship grant applications; and 7 pages for Doctoral student grant applications.

The Project description is divided into the following predefined sections:

- a) Objectives of the project, originality and impact
- b) Present state of knowledge in the field
- c) Research plan (time and work plan, methodology, and milestones) and deliverables
- d) Management and co-operation (domestic/foreign)
- e) Proposed publication of results and data storage (including open access policy)
- f) Contribution of doctoral and master's degree students to the project
- g) Career development plan (for postdoctoral fellowship applications)

The applicants make the obvious demand that those reviewing the proposal are experts in the field of science under which the proposal falls. In return, one of the prime premises for a high-quality review is that the project has been described in detail so

that the review can be made on the basis of the information provided in the proposal. A high-quality project description will facilitate the professional review of the proposal. The following points should be kept in mind:

- It is imperative that the project has well defined hypotheses and objectives, and has been divided into well-defined work packages.
- Each work package of the project should be described individually, their respective connections explained, and the time necessary for each work package estimated.
- Research methods shall be described in detail, and the reasons for choosing the specific methods stated. The methodology used for data collection and interpretation must be justified.
- The main milestones for each year in the project shall be described.
- Any co-operation (domestic/international) within the project should be explained, both between the different scientists and researchers, and whether there is an active co-operation between universities, institutions and companies. The role of each party should also be clearly defined.
- Information on which parts of the project are executed by doctoral or master's students should be included, as well as information on what the students' contribution in the project entails.
- Explanations and justifications should be given for the expected benefit and utilization of the results of the project. The benefit could be knowledge-related, environmental, economic, social, etc. The deliverables of the projects should be measurable "units" resulting from the project. Examples of deliverables include: published scientific articles, university diplomas, software, databases, prototypes, production methods, new products, patents, models, research methods, confirmed scientific theories, etc.
- Furthermore, it should be explained in the application how the results would be

promoted, as well as their publications in professional journals, reports, conferences, etc., and whether, and then how, the proprietary rights to the results would be protected.

#### **Appendix B. Curriculum vitae**

The CV shall include information on current employment status, education and training, supervision of graduate students, positions and awards, a list of relevant publications, and a link to information on citation index. Any gaps in research activity due to sickness, parental leave or other reasons should be noted.

#### **Appendix C. Letter of intent**

A signed letter of intent by "other participants" confirming their participation and explaining their role in the project. A letter of intent is not needed from co-proposers.

#### **Appendix D. Declaration from host institute**

(required for Post-doctoral fellowship applications)  
A letter of declaration from host institute confirming invitation to the applicant and stating that the available facilities are appropriate.

#### **Appendix E. Doctoral degree certificate**

(required for Post-doctoral fellowship applications).

#### **Appendix F. Doctoral student admission statement**

(required for Doctoral student grant applications) A letter from the appropriate institution confirming the admission of the doctoral student to the doctoral programme.

#### **Appendix G. Price quote**

If equipment costs are applied for, price quotes from the manufacturer/vendor must accompany the proposal.

### **4.5 EXPERT PANELS IN THE CALL 2016**

In the 2016 call, there are seven expert panels in different fields of sciences (see Table 3). Each panel consists of up to seven active researchers selected for their expertise in their respective fields. Applicants select in which expert panel the proposal is reviewed. For further information regarding appointment of expert panel members and the role

and responsibility of the expert panels, please see section 5, *The review process*.

Specific questions regarding individual expert panels and disciplines are handled by Rannís staff. Applicants should under no circumstances contact expert panel members with matters regarding proposals during or after the review process. Should an applicant discuss his/her proposal with a panel member during the review process, the application will be rejected.

**Table 3. Expert panels in the annual open call 2016.**

Expert Panel	Scientific category
<b>Physical sciences and mathematics</b>	Physical sciences Chemical sciences Nano-technology Earth and related environmental sciences Mathematics
<b>Engineering and technical sciences</b>	Industrial Biotechnology Environmental engineering Computer and information sciences Environmental biotechnology Civil engineering Materials engineering Mechanical engineering Medical engineering Electrical engineering, electronic engineering, information engineering Chemical engineering Other engineering and technologies
<b>Natural and environmental sciences</b>	Biological sciences (plant sciences, botany, zoology, ornithology, entomology, behavioural sciences biology, marine biology, freshwater biology, limnology, ecology, biodiversity conservation, evolutionary biology) Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries Agriculture and biotechnology Other agricultural sciences Animal and dairy science Other natural sciences Veterinary sciences
<b>Biomedical sciences</b>	Basic medicine Biological sciences (cell biology, microbiology, virology, biochemistry, molecular biology, biochemical research methods, mycology, biophysics, genetic and heredity)
<b>Clinical sciences and public health</b>	Clinical medicine Public health Health sciences Other medical sciences Health biotechnology
<b>Social sciences and educational sciences</b>	Economics and business Educational sciences Law Other social sciences Political Science Social and economic geography Psychology Media and communications Sociology
<b>Humanities and arts</b>	History and archaeology Languages and literature Art (arts, history of arts, performing arts, music) Other humanities Philosophy, ethics and religion

## 5 THE REVIEW PROCESS

### 5.1 APPOINTMENT OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

Expert panel members are appointed by the Science Committee of the Icelandic Science and Technology Policy Council. Each panel shall have as equal gender distribution as possible, and at least two members of each panel should be professionally active outside of Iceland. The requirement for serving as a panel member is, as a minimum, a qualification equivalent to associate professor. When appointed, the panels are made public on the Rannís website. Each member is appointed for a two-year period, with a possibility of a two-year extension time at the end of the first appointment. Members of review panels are replaced in a gradual fashion over time.

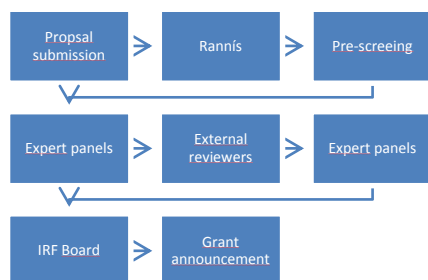
The Science Committee appoints one person from each of the panels to serve as chair for that panel. The chair, a researcher with broad subject expertise, is responsible for assessment being made in accordance with the IRF mandate and ethical policy. The chair is also responsible for coordinating the work of the expert panel with the help of the programme officer.

### 5.2 PLURIDISCIPLINARY (MULTI-, INTER-, AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY) PROPOSALS

When submitting a pluridisciplinary proposal, applicants are asked to indicate all relevant expert panels, identifying one as a preferred “home” panel. The proposal will be evaluated by readers from all relevant panels and external experts selected based on expertise within specific fields, and based on knowledge and experience within pluridisciplinary research. The final evaluation is agreed upon between the respective readers in the different panels, but is ranked among proposals from the selected “home” panel.

### 5.3 PROCESSING OF APPLICATIONS

When an application has been successfully submitted to Rannís through the electronic submission system, it is processed as follows (Figure 2):



**Figure 2. Processing of applications from submission to grant announcement.**

### 5.3.1 INITIAL SCREENING

All proposals are screened by the Rannís staff to ensure compliance with the rules of the IRF. Proposals that do not pass the initial screening are rejected without a review, and the applicant is notified of that outcome.

## 5.4 ASSESSMENTS OF PROPOSALS

Each proposal is reviewed by two to three external experts, and the respective expert panel. All proposals within each expert panel are ranked based on the overall quality of the proposal (see Part III, below).

## 5.5 FUNDING DECISION

When the expert panels have finalized their review and ranking of applications, the chair of each panel meets with the IRF Board and gives an overview of the expert panel's work and introduces the proposals. The final decision on funding is taken by the IRF Board. The Board can seek advice beyond the expert panels if necessary. In addition to the expert panel review, the IRF Board must take into consideration the funding policy approved by the Science and Technology Policy Council, and the annual budget of the fund. When the IRF Board has decided on funding, all applicants will receive a formal reply and a copy of both the expert panel review and the external reviews.

Under Art. 4 of Act No. 3/2003, the funding decisions of the IRF Board are not subject to administrative complaints.

## PART III – EXPERT PANELS AND EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

### 6 EXPERT PANEL GUIDELINES

The role of the Expert Panel is to review proposals to the IRF based on the scientific value of the project, the applicants' qualifications to carry out the project, appropriateness of the research facilities, and the likelihood of the project resulting in the proposed impact. The expert panels establish a ranking list based on the expert evaluations, and finalise each proposal review with a written report.

#### 6.1 THE REVIEW PROCESS

Each proposal is assigned to three readers within the Expert panel. Members of the panel indicate which proposals they are willing to read and which they cannot review due to conflict of interest. The first reader is responsible for finding experts outside of Iceland (*two* experts for project grant proposals, post-doctoral fellowship proposals, and doctoral student grant proposals; and *three* experts for grant of excellence proposals and pluridisciplinary proposals). Selections of external reviewers are based on area of expertise and scientific merits according to professional websites and citation databases. The primary reader has to make sure that there is no conflict of interest between reviewers and applicants. Applicants are allowed to identify non-preferred reviewers. In such cases, applicants are asked to specify the reasons for their request. Experts whom applicants have identified in their proposal as "Non-preferred reviewer" will not be contacted.

When an external expert has agreed on reviewing a proposal the Expert panel member notifies Rannís, which then provides the external expert with an access to the Rannís on-line review system. The external review involves an in-depth reading of proposals. It should be noted that in accordance with the [Icelandic Information Act](#)<sup>7</sup> (no. 140/2012), Rannís cannot keep the names of external reviewers confidential. Rannís only informs applicants of the identity of reviewers upon request. When external

<sup>7</sup> In Icelandic

reviewers have submitted their evaluation, the first reader prepares the Expert panel evaluation report on the Rannís on-line review system and grades the proposal. When the first reader has entered his/her evaluation text, he/she notifies the second and third readers, who then provide their comments. When all reviews have been obtained, the Expert panel meets at Rannís to discuss all proposals and deliberate on ranking. All members of the expert panel are encouraged to read all proposals before the panel meeting. When the IRF Board has decided on the grant awards, the proposers receive the Expert panel evaluation and the external reviews.

## 6.2 ONLINE EVALUATION SYSTEM

Each panel member gets access to IRF's online evaluation system where all proposals to the panel and relevant documents can be viewed.

The web-based expert panel review sheet is divided into three parts:

### PART 1 – Proposal Overview

Part 1 contains an overview of the proposal, including project description and accompanying files relevant to the review process. Submitted peer reviews from assigned external reviewers are also available in pdf form.

### PART 2 – Review

Part 2 contains three text fields and a ranking sheet. The review can only be edited by the primary reader and the chair of the expert panel, but can be viewed by all expert panel members. In the text fields, the primary reader summarizes the strengths/weaknesses of the proposal based on the external reviews and the discussions at expert panel meetings. Proposals are assigned a grade based on the overall quality of the proposals (see Table 4).

### PART 3 – Submit

In Part 3, an overview is generated automatically from input in Part 2. The panel chair submits the evaluation after the panel meeting and after panel members have had an opportunity to edit the review text in accordance with panel discussions.

**Table 4. Explanation of grade.**

Grade	Impact
A1	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
A2	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
A3	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
A4	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses. Only for further consideration if funds are available
B	Moderate Impact – Some strengths but with at least one moderate weakness. Not recommended for funding
C	Low Impact – Not recommended for further consideration. A few strengths and at least one major weakness

## 6.3 EXPERT PANEL MEETINGS

### Before the meeting

The first reader drafts a summary evaluation of the proposals he/she is responsible for, based on the submitted external reviews. When the first reader has entered his/her evaluation text, he/she notifies the two second readers.

### At the meeting

During the expert panel meetings, the primary readers, supported by the two second readers, present their respective proposals, briefly introduce the background of the external reviewers, present the external reviewers' reports, and finally offer their own assessment of the respective proposals. The argumentation must be sound and just in order for the applicant to benefit as much as possible from the evaluation. The two second readers give their comment and the panel discusses the review. Panel members with a conflict of interest are requested to leave the room while the relevant proposals are being discussed. This is documented in the meeting minutes by the programme officer.

After discussing all proposals, each Expert panel establishes a ranking list based on the final grades given by the panel. A separate ranking list for each

grant type is prepared. Proposals are ranked into three categories: A (A.1-4), B and C. Please note that the grade A.1 should be reserved for top proposals only. No more than 5% of proposals should be given the grade A.1, and no more than 10% should receive a grade of A.2. There are no restrictions on grades A.3, A.4, B and C. Proposals getting A.3 and A.4 should be ranked within the group.

### After the meeting

The chair of the expert panel is responsible for submitting the written reports to the IRF database.

External reviews received after the expert panel meetings and before the final IRF Board meeting are discussed by the panel members via email, and the final grade is confirmed or altered based on the outcome of those discussions.

## 7 EXTERNAL REVIEWERS' GUIDELINES

### 7.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

Project grant proposals, doctoral student grant proposals, and Postdoctoral fellowship proposals are reviewed by two external experts, whereas Grant of excellence proposals and pluridisciplinary proposals are evaluated by three external experts. Within each expert panel, proposals are ranked based on external evaluations and discussions within the panel. The ranking list is presented to the IRF Board to make a final decision on awards.

All reviewers engaged in reviewing applications for IRF are required to read Section 2: *General information about the Icelandic Research Fund*, and Section 5: *The review process* in this handbook.

No fee is paid for external evaluations of proposals to the IRF.

#### 7.1.1 REVIEWERS' ANONYMITY

In accordance with Icelandic law, Rannís cannot keep the names of external reviewers confidential. Rannís only informs applicants of the identity of reviewers upon request.

#### 7.1.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

External reviewers are asked to identify any conflict of interest. Conflict of interest disqualifies reviewers.

### 7.2 EXTERNAL REVIEW - INSTRUCTIONS

The External Peer Review sheet is divided into four parts:

#### PART 1 – Proposal

This part contains the proposal under review, including project description and accompanying documents relevant to the review process.

#### PART 2 – Review criteria

This part contains the criteria to be evaluated.

It is important to provide clear and constructive criticism in the review. When evaluating the proposal, the following is to be considered:

#### Originality and impact of the project

- Originality of the aim, theories/hypotheses and approach.
- Project's potential impact on the scientific field and society.
- Expected deliverables (e.g. articles or books, patents or other kind of property rights). Dissemination and other communication to the general public and stakeholders.

#### Scientific quality and feasibility

- Scientific value of the project.
- Does the overall design of the project, its research questions and hypotheses meet the standards of highest quality? Is the scientific basis for the project realistic? Are the research methods appropriate?
- Relation of project objectives to the present state of knowledge in the field.
- Potential risk factors and contingency plans
- Are the scientific/intellectual merits of the proposed project clear, convincing and compelling?
- Does the proposed project have the character of thoroughness, e.g. in its definition of the problem and proposed solutions, and its review of the objectives of the project?



**Principal investigator (supervisor in the case of Doctoral student grant), other participants, and project management**

- Relevant knowledge, experience and qualifications of the principal investigator and other participants in the field of the proposed project.
- Experience with national and international collaboration.
- Research environment, infrastructure and resources.
- Feasibility and appropriateness of the proposed work. Plans for project implementation, including breakdown into work packages/sub-projects, milestones and deliverables.
- Management structure and coordination of project.

- Role of graduate students (not applicable to doctoral student grants).

**Impact on carrier development (when evaluating Postdoctoral Fellowship proposals)**

- Project relevance to career plans of applicant.
- Future cooperation with host institution.

**PART 3 – Summary**

In this section, the proposal's overall strengths and weaknesses are summarized, and a final grade is given (Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, or Poor).

**PART 4 – Submit**

In this section, reviewers can access a printable overview of the review. Reviewers will be able to submit their review to Rannís when all necessary information has been entered.