

THE INFRASTRUCTUR FUND'S HANDBOOK

**RULES OF THE ICELANDIC INFRASTRUCTURE FUND
FOR APPLICANTS AND EXPERT PANEL**

2020

Version 1.0

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The Board of the Research Infrastructure Fund has approved this manual for the year 2020 (version 1.0).

Should there be any discrepancies between the Icelandic and English versions, the Icelandic version shall prevail.

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Preface

This is the first version of the Infrastructure Fund's (IF) handbook for applicants and Expert Panels, valid for the grant year 2020. The objective of this publication is to increase the transparency of the process for all parties involved, from the announcement of deadlines for submitting applications to the decisions on funding. The handbook also contains the fund's rules and other useful information, such as the rights and obligations of grant recipients. The handbook is published annually in conjunction with application deadlines. For the handbook to serve its purpose, everyone involved with the process (applicants and Expert Panel members) are encouraged to read it in its entirety.

1 GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

1.1 The role of the Infrastructure Fund

The Research Infrastructure Fund is an open competitive fund that operates according to the Act on Public Support for Scientific Research (no. 3/2003 with later amendments). The role of the fund is to support the development of research infrastructures in Iceland. IF awards grants in accordance with the general emphases of the Science Committee and Technology Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council, presented in IF's funding policy. IF provides grants for the purchase, construction or major repairs of devices, databases, software and other equipment that is considered important for research progress and to pay for access to domestic or international infrastructure.

1.2 Board of directors of the Infrastructure Fund

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture appoints a four-member Board for a period of three years following nominations by the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council. In addition, the Minister appoints a Chair of the Board without a nomination and a Vice-Chair from one of the nominated Board members. When appointed, the names of the Board members are published on the website of the Icelandic Centre for Research (Rannís). The Board issues rules and

guidelines for the IF and makes funding decisions based on evaluations by the Expert Panel.

1.3 Handling of grants

Expert staff of the IF at Rannís provide support and advice on grant-related queries between the hours of 9:00 - 16:00, Monday to Friday. General questions regarding the fund and applications under review shall be directed to expert staff members of the IF.

1.4 Ethics for administrators

Members of the IF Board, the Expert Panel, IF expert staff and others who administratively handle applications to the IF are bound by strict confidentiality. Applications, including all enclosed materials and review sheets are treated as confidential information. The confidential information is not to be used for any purpose other than the review process and may not be disclosed, published or otherwise made available to third parties. No copies of any confidential information shall be made available in any format, except for purposes of review. After completion of the review, a copy of the application and review documents will be stored in the electronic registry of Rannís in accordance with regulations on electronic records management. Expert Panel members acknowledge that any disclosure or misappropriation of any of this confidential information may cause the owner irreversible 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 ownership is in addition to the remedies otherwise available to registered owners or such parties that derive rights from the actual owner.

1.5 Rules regarding conflict of interest

External reviewers, Expert Panel members and Board members are considered disqualified from assessing an application if any of the following conditions apply:

- General disqualification reasons listed in the Administrative Procedures Act No. 37/1993.
- Close friendship, family ties or affinity by marriage between an Expert Panel

member or a Board member and an applicant.

- Personal conflicts exist between an Expert Panel member or Board member and an applicant.
- If Expert Panel member or Board member is in professional competition with the applicant.
- Expert Panel members cannot be principal investigators of an application to the IF.
- If a Board member is a party to an IF application, the Board member must resign from their role on the Board for the relevant grant year and a deputy Board member will take their place.

Expert Panel members and Board members who are disqualified in pursuant to the above must recuse themselves from meetings where the relevant application is considered and a decision about the grant is taken. This shall be reported in the meeting's minutes.

If a Board member or member of the Expert Panel is employed by the applicant, the closeness of the relationship with employees that are involved in the application and with the directors of the relevant body must be assessed. This type of relationship does not automatically lead to disqualification due to conflict of interest.

Members of the Board and the Expert Panel are responsible for identifying circumstances that might create a conflict of interest that would influence their judgment of applications submitted to the fund.

1.6 Misconduct

Should suspicion of misconduct, fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misappropriation in connection with an application or a funded research infrastructure arise, the IF Board will be notified, without exception.

Suspicion of misconduct during the review phase will result in the withdrawal of an application from the review process during an investigation. Should suspicion of misconduct be deemed baseless, the application will be reviewed following standard review procedures. If evidence of misconduct is found, the application will be rejected without a review and the applicant's institute/company will

be held responsible for taking appropriate actions. The IF Board is also authorised to initiate independent investigations into cases of misconduct.

Misconduct discovered during the application phase, or during or after the funding period, may result in the Board of the IF imposing a specific penalty, such as a partial or full repayment of the grant or that the applicant will be barred from submitting future applications to the fund.

1.7 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 through open access. Research results derived from the utilisation of a research infrastructure which has received funding from the IF will be made available through open access unless otherwise agreed. This can be done with publication in open access journals or in open searchable, digital repositories along with publication in a traditional subscription-based journal. The final peer reviewed manuscript shall be returned to the repository immediately after the article has been accepted for publication. If the journal requires a waiting period prior to open access, the article shall be made available for public access automatically when the waiting period expires. Please familiarise yourself with the rules of Rannís regarding repositories.¹ Opinvisindi.is provides repositories for Icelandic universities.

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

2 INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

2.1 Types of grants

The scope of Research Infrastructure Fund consists of approximately ISK 279 million in year 2020. There are four types of grants awarded:

- for the purchase of research equipment
- for the development of research infrastructure
- for the upgrading and maintenance of older infrastructures
- for financing access to research infrastructures nationally or abroad.

¹ <https://www.rannis.is/starfsemi/opinn-adgangur>

The contribution of IF shall be a minimum of ISK 2 million for equipment purchases, development of research infrastructures and upgrades or maintenance of older research facilities. There is no minimum amount for access to research infrastructures.

2.2 Purchase of Equipment

This type of grant is intended for the purchase of expensive research equipment or a set of devices but not for several small devices. If more than one device is being applied for, it must be demonstrated that the devices can only be used together to serve a common function. Grants are not awarded for the installation of equipment or for a set of devices that cost less than ISK 2 million. Applications that do not meet the aforementioned requirements will be rejected.

2.1.2 Development of research infrastructure

This type of grant is for the construction of specialised facilities and opening and/or creating databases and electronic infrastructure (i.e. e-infrastructures such as data storage, computers, high-speed connections and communication networks).

2.1.3 Upgrading and maintenance of older infrastructures

This type of grant is intended for the upgrading, maintenance and repair of existing infrastructures, e.g. equipment, databases or other electronic infrastructure. The purchase of spare parts for maintenance may be included in this type of grant award.

2.1.4 Access

This type of grant is intended to finance access to existing research infrastructures in Iceland or abroad, such as devices, specialised research premises, databases and software. Applications may include travel expenditure related to access. There is no minimum amount awarded for access grants.

2.2 General conditions

Applications must meet all stated eligibility criteria in order to be reviewed. If it becomes apparent during the evaluation process that one or more conditions are not met, the application will be removed from the review process.

2.2.1 Approved expenses

The grant award can cover up to 75% of the total infrastructure costs without Value Added Tax (VAT). Costs accrued before the grant is awarded are ineligible.

A binding price quote (bid) from a manufacturer or a service provider must be attached to an application for confirmation of the requested amount. Price lists are not accepted as price bids. Shipping costs cannot exceed 10% of the total cost and must be specified in the price quote. Costs in excess of this ratio are not funded and are not considered as contribution. If a binding bid does not comply with an application or if there is a discrepancy between the bid offer and the amount of the application, the application will be rejected.

Up to ISK 5 million can be used for labour costs related to equipment purchases, reconstruction or upgrading. A maximum of 75% of the total salary costs can be deducted. If an application includes labour costs, a detailed estimate of the number of hours worked for each section and the total salary cost for the work must be attached to the application, otherwise it will be rejected.

If total costs change, e.g. due to a better offer from the seller, the contribution of the IF will be adjusted accordingly. If there is a greater than 5% increase in the total cost of purchasing infrastructure based on the price in the application, the beneficiary must request such an increase from the board of IF before a formal purchase is made.

Should the grant recipient cancel the proposed purchase, the grant will be cancelled. Awarded grants cannot be utilised for purchases other than those originally applied for unless there is strong justification and approval from the Board of IF.

The application shall describe the operation of the infrastructure applied for, the operating costs and financing, the rules of access, the estimated usage charges, if applicable, the service needs of both the infrastructure and the users, as well as how those needs will be met, requirements made to users, training etc. Depreciation shall not be included in operating costs and fees. Applications must include a confirmation of participation in operating the infrastructure from involved organisations. A clear explanation of how infrastructure ownership and co-operation will be organised shall be included as well.

2.3 Applicant's matching contribution

The own contribution of the applicant shall be a minimum of 25% of the total cost without VAT. The contribution must be ensured once the application is submitted, and a declaration to that effect must accompany the application. Otherwise the application will be rejected.

A matching contribution is defined as part of the financing or a part of the labour costs. Discounts on equipment, work or facilities are not considered a matching contribution.

Instruments purchased for grants from IF are exempt from VAT (see Article 35 of Regulation 630/2008 on various customs privileges). A tax deduction is not considered a matching contribution.

Note that the matching contribution is generally not exempt from VAT and applicants are responsible for applying the relevant tax rate to the matching contribution.

Applicants are solely responsible for fulfilling the fund's requirements for the matching contribution.

2.4 Timeline

The call for grant applications to the IF is announced at least 6 weeks before the deadline. The expected timeframe for processing the applications is described in Figure 1.

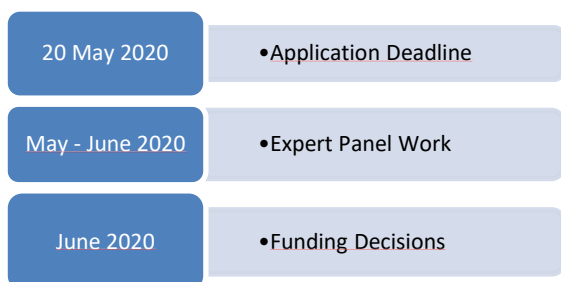


Figure 1. Estimated time frames for the grant year 2020.

3 REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS

Applications to the IF are reviewed by the Expert Panel before they are processed by the Board.

The role of the Expert Panel is to assess the quality of applications with regards to some key factors such as the importance of the infrastructure for research, the access of other researchers to the infrastructure, the cost-effectiveness of the operational plans and the scientific activities of

those who will utilise the infrastructure (see further in section 3.2.2).

3.1 Appointments to expert panel

The Science and the Technology Committees of the Icelandic Science and Technology Policy Council (STPC) appoints nine individuals with extensive experience and knowledge of the research environment, both in Iceland and abroad, as members of the Expert Panel.

The composition of the Panel reflects the diversity of various disciplines such as the social sciences, health sciences, humanities, arts, education sciences, natural sciences, science and engineering.

The STPC Committees appoint a member of the panel to serve as a Chair. The Chair, who is assisted by an expert staff member from Rannís assigned to the panel, is responsible for coordinating the work of the panel and to reach a consensus on the assessments of applications.

It is the responsibility of the Chair and the staff member to ensure that the work of the panel complies with the rules of the IF. When appointed, the composition of the panel is made public on the website of Rannís.

3.2 Processing of applications

3.2.1 Initial screening

Applications are screened by an expert staff member of Rannís. Incomplete applications and application which do not comply with IF rules are rejected without further review, and the relevant applicants are informed of that outcome.

3.2.2 EXPERT ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS

The Infrastructure Fund awards grants in accordance with the provisions and policy of the Science and Technology Committees of the STPC. The following items are also taken into account when grants are allocated (items in bold are drawn directly from the Science and Technology Committees' allocation policy):

- **The infrastructure is important for progress in research in Iceland and the applicant's research.** - How important are the infrastructures for research in Iceland? Is ongoing research in this field of science dependent on the equipment and how was the research conducted before? How likely is it that the infrastructure will be as

beneficial as stated in the application? Can the infrastructure benefit other fields of science?

- **Infrastructure investment creates new opportunities for research and/or the infrastructure is linked to projects funded by the Icelandic Research Fund or a Strategic research program.** – Will the infrastructure enable research that has not been possible before? Will the infrastructure open new research opportunities in this field of science (or other fields)? Are applicants able to carry out research funded by the Icelandic Research Fund or a strategic research program without the infrastructure?
- **Cooperation on the utilisation of infrastructure is foreseen between institutions or between institutions and companies.** - How many organizations are involved in the application and how do they co-operate? Does the infrastructure benefit all the organisations involved in the application? Will the infrastructure benefit researchers who are not employed by the organisations involved in the application?
- **Cost and funding plans are feasible.**
- It strengthens the application if the infrastructure provides opportunities for education and training in the relevant field of study and leads to recruitment of researchers and academics.
- Infrastructure funded by IF shall be accessible to other research groups as much as possible. IF shall be informed how access to the infrastructure is provided.

Please note that under no circumstances should applicants contact Expert Panel members or Board members during the review phase. All enquires and remarks should be directed to Rannís. Violation of this provision leads to the rejection of the application.

3.2.3 Funding decision

When the Expert Panel has finished its work, the Chair meets with the Board of IF, reports on the Expert Panel's deliberations and whether problems arose in the assessment of the applications. In particular, the Chair reports on applications that are classified in Category I and the top ones in Category II if necessary (see Table 1 in Section 4.3). The Board

makes decisions on funding after receiving the assessment of the Expert Panel. The Board seeks advice beyond the Expert Panel if needed. In addition to the professional evaluation, submitted by the panel, the Board shall take into considerations the general emphases of the STPC's fund's allocation policy and the fund's financial liquidity. When the Board has concluded the applicants will receive a letter of reply with a final evaluation by the Expert Panel.

The decisions of the Board on allocations of funding from the IF are final. Pursuant to Article 4 of Act No. 3/2003, the funding decisions of the IF Board are not subject to administrative complaints.

3.3 After receiving funds

3.3.1 Grants awarded

Information on grants awarded is published on the Rannís website, where the Fund's database is also available with information on previous grants awarded.

3.3.2 Grants agreement

The Infrastructure Fund awards grants to universities, public research institutes and companies. Before signing the contract, the institutions and companies involved in the infrastructure must sign a partnership agreement stating where the infrastructure will be located and how access and operation will be arranged. The cooperation agreement shall also state how the whole project will be financed.

Rannís enters into an agreement with a representative of the recipient (the representative of the application) on behalf of the IF. The contract must be finalized within four months from the announcement of the grant and purchases of devices must be completed within one year or else the grant will be cancelled. Deadlines to complete equipment purchases can be extended if requested formally before 1 December of the allocation year. All grant agreements that have not been finalized will be written off on 1 July of the year following the year of allocation.

3.3.3 Payments and follow ups

Receipts sent to IF shall be in accordance with the itemized list of devices in the application so that there is no doubt as to which part of the grant is being expensed.

The IF pays out its part of the financing once it receives receipts and copies of payment confirmation from a bank or a copy of an entry from an institution's accounting system. Each receipt is refunded in accordance to the percentage stated in the application (at maximum 75%). This applies also to labour costs. Copies of bids, e-mails or vouchers must not be submitted with the invoices unless there is a specific reason to do so. In the case of salaries, a statement of paid salaries must be submitted stating the name/s of the person/s who worked, the number of working hours and the total payment. In the case of labour costs, a recipient can receive 1/3 of a part at the time of signing, 1/3 of a part when the work has been halfway completed and the remainder when the payroll is available at the end of the work.

In the case of multiple devices, the beneficiary collects the payment receipts and the grant will be paid out when everything has been paid.

The Infrastructure Fund does not manage the grants other than to pay into the beneficiary's account. If there is more than one institution to an application, they must decide between themselves who receives the grant and applicants are responsible for the grant being shared between themselves.

Rannís employees or the National Audit Office may, without any cause, examine the purchase process, communication with the seller and the invoice breakdown after the purchase of infrastructure. The IF Board will be notified of suspected misconduct without exception.

4 EXPERT PANEL GUIDELINES

The role of the IF Expert Panels is to review applications to IF based on the scientific value of the infrastructures and the likelihood that their utilisation will yield measurable results and benefits. The Expert Panel establishes a ranking list based on the expert evaluation and finalise each application review with a written report.

4.1 Online review system

Each Expert Panel member gets access to Rannís' online rating system where all applications and relevant accompanying documents, in addition to the Expert Panel review sheets, can be viewed. Expert Panel members must accept the terms of confidentiality and declare any possible conflict of

interest before getting full access to the applications. Expert Panel members do not get access to grant applications for which they have declared a conflict of interest.

Expert Panel members also identify the applications which they consider themselves to be well-qualified to review.

4.2 The review process

Applications received by the Expert Panel are divided between the members of the panel. Each application is assigned to two readers. One of the readers is also the editor and is responsible for drafting the evaluation of the Expert Panel in consultation with the other reader. A similar number of applications is expected for each panel member. All panel members are encouraged to familiarise themselves with all the applications.

4.3 Expert Panel meetings

Before Expert Panel meetings

Readers write a brief review and evaluation of each application in the online review system. Based on the reader's comments, the editor compiles a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which he is responsible. The summary is also a draft of the Expert Panel's assessment report.

In Expert Panel meetings

The Expert Panel meeting are held in the premises of Rannís. Panel members who have declared themselves ineligible to review an application are required to leave the meeting room when the application in question is discussed. This shall be documented in the meeting minutes by the expert staff member from Rannís assigned to the panel.

At the Expert Panel meetings, the editor presents the application and their own assessment. After that, the reader makes their comments. The panel discusses the assessments and finalises a common evaluation. Once the panel has discussed all the applications, they are prioritised based on strengths. Grades are given in accordance with the overall assessment by the panel (see Table 1) and applications in Class I (and Class II if funding permits) are ranked by quality.

Applicants will receive a response letter together with an Expert Panel evaluation once the Board of the Infrastructure Fund has decided on its funding

allocation for the year. The report must be written in a constructive manner and in such a way that may benefit the applicant.

Table 1. Strengths of applications.

I	Applications that the panel considers to be outstanding and should be prioritised for funding.
II	Applications that are eligible and should be funded if there are enough funds.
III	Applications that the panel considers should not be supported.

After Expert Panel meetings

The chair of the Expert Panel confirms the final evaluation of the panel and presents the evaluation process and results to IF Board members, who then make a decision on grant funding.

The expert staff member of Rannís, assigned to the panel, accompanies the chair to the Board meeting. The main proceedings are carried out in such a way that the chair presents:

- Expert Panel
 - Introduction of the panel’s members, their names and expertise.
 - How well did the expertise of the panel cover the fields of the applications?
- Applications
 - Number received by the Expert Panel.
 - Distribution of grant types
 - Brief description of projects evaluated in Class I (Class II if needed).
- Issues that arose during the review process.
- Tips on how to improve workflow.

Decisions by the Board of the Infrastructure Fund on grants are, according to law, not subject to administrative complaint.