THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND

REVIEW CRITERIA

GUIDELINES FOR EXPERT PANELS AND
EXTERNAL EXPERTS

2024

Rannsóknasjóður

Contents

1 EXPERT PANEL GUIDELINES

The role of the IRF Expert Panels is to evaluate applications submitted to the IRF based on the scientific value of the projects, the applicants' qualifications to carry out the project, suitability of the research facilities, and the likelihood of the project resulting in measurable results and gains. The Expert Panels establish a ranking list based on the expert evaluations and finalize each application review with a written report.

1.1 ONLINE REVIEW SYSTEM

Each Expert Panel member is given access to the IRF's online rating system where all applications submitted to the panel and relevant accompanying documents and Expert Panel review sheets can be viewed. Expert Panel members must accept a confidentiality statement and declare possible conflict of interest before getting full access to the applications. Expert Panel members do not get access to grant applications where they have declared conflict of interest.

1.2 THE REVIEW PROCESS

The applications received by the Expert Panel are divided amongst panel members. Each application is then assigned to three readers, but all panel members are encouraged to review all applications assigned to their respective Expert Panels. The first reader (editor) is responsible for finding external experts to assess the application, at least two experts for Project Grant applications, and three experts for applications of Grants of Excellence. External experts shall be professionally active outside of Iceland. The selection of external experts is based on the relevant scientist's area of expertise and scientific merits according to professional websites and citation databases. The first reader must make sure that there is no conflict of interest between external experts and applicants. External experts must then confirm that there is no conflict of interest.

The external experts that agree to review an application are given access to a web portal with all necessary information regarding the assessment process. The external review involves an in-depth reading of applications. When external experts have submitted their evaluation and readers on the Expert Panel have drafted their reviews, the Expert Panel meets at the premises of Rannís to discuss all applications and deliberate on rankings.

1.3 EXPERT PANEL MEETINGS

Before Expert Panel meetings

For each application three readers from the Expert Panel write an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the applications. The first reader (the editor) drafts a panel evaluation based on the submitted external reviews and the evaluations from the second and third readers.

At Expert Panel meetings

During the Expert Panel meetings, the editors present their respective applications, briefly introduce the background of the external experts, present the external experts' reports, and finally offer their own assessment of the respective applications. The second and third reader then provide their comments and the whole panel discusses the review. Based on the panel's discussion, the editor prepares a final conclusion, which should be constructive and written so that the applicants benefit from it. After discussing all applications, each Expert Panel establishes a ranking list of applications based on the final grades given by the panel. The grades given by the Expert Panel are explained in Table 1.

Grade	Review
A1	Outstanding application with essentially no weaknesses
A2	Very strong application with negligible weaknesses
A3	Strong application with some minor weaknesses
B	Application with one or more limiting weaknesses
C	Application with major weaknesses or not eligible for this fund

Table 1. Grades awarded by Expert Panels

Expert Panel members who have declared conflicts of interest regarding an application shall leave the meeting when the relevant application is discussed, and this shall be documented in the meeting minutes by the IRF staff assigned to the panel.

A separate ranking list for each grant type is prepared, and applications are ranked into three categories: A (A1-A3), B and C. Sub-category A1 is reserved for top applications only.

After Expert Panel meetings

The chair of the Expert Panel confirms the final assessment of the Expert Panel in the online rating system of Rannís.

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

2 EXTERNAL EXPERTS GUIDELINES

2.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

Project Grant applications are generally reviewed by two external experts. Grants of Excellence are evaluated by at least three external experts. In the Expert Panel, applications are discussed, taking into consideration the external expert evaluations, graded and ranked. The ranking list is presented to the IRF Board for a final decision on allocations.

No fee is paid for the work of external experts.

2.1.1 NON-PREFERRED REVIEWERS

2.1.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

External experts are responsible for identifying any circumstances which constitute a conflict of interest for them when it comes to reviewing IRF applications. External experts must confirm that there is no conflict of interest prior to being granted access to the application.

2.2 EXTERNAL EXPERT EVALUATION GUIDELINES

The external expert review sheet is divided into four parts:

Application

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

Review criteria

This part contains the criteria to be evaluated. It is important that any criticism is well founded and the review constructive. The following shall be kept in mind when assessing applications:

Originality and impact of the project

- Originality of the aim, research questions/ hypotheses and approach.

- Project's potential impact on the academic field and society.

- Expected deliverables (e.g., articles or books, patents or other kind of property rights). Dissemination of findings to the general public and stakeholders.

Scientific quality and feasibility

- Scientific quality of the project.

- Adequate detail in the project description for example in terms of research question and methods of answering it.

- Is the project description detailed enough, e.g., in formulating and answering its research question? are its aims clearly specified?

- Feasibility and importance of the project. Project plan, work packages, milestones, and deliverables.

Applicants

- Relevant knowledge, experience, and qualifications of applicants.

- Experience with national and international collaboration.

- Research environment, infrastructure, and resources.

- Management structure and coordination of project.

- Contribution of graduate students.

Grade	Review
5 - Excellent	Outstanding application with essentially no weaknesses
4 - Very good	Very strong application with negligible weaknesses
3 - Good	Strong application with some minor weaknesses
2 - Moderate	Application with one or more limiting weaknesses
1 - Poor	Application with major weaknesses or not eligible for this fund
Table 2. Strength categories for external reviews	

Table 2 is used for reference in numerical assessment of each factor.

Summary

A summary of strength and weaknesses.

Submit

In this section, external experts can access an overview of the review for confirmation. Upon confirmation, the review is stored in the database of Rannís and becomes accessible to Expert Panel members

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