THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND HANDBOOK

RULES OF THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND FOR APPLICANTS, EXPERT PANELS AND EXTERNAL EXPERTS

2022

Rannsóknasjóður

The Icelandic Research Fund board has approved the Handbook for 2022.

Following are the main changes:

- Deadline for submission of applications is June 15th.
- Increased maximum grant amount for Project Grants, Postdoctoral Fellowships and Doctoral Student Grants.
- Recipients of Doctoral Student Grants do not need to turn in transaction lists with annual and final reports.
- The maximum length of CVs is 5 pages.
- All amounts in ISK instead of thousand ISK in the online submission system.

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PREFACE

This is the Icelandic Research Fund's handbook for applicants, Expert Panels and external experts; valid for the grant year 2022. The objective is to increase the transparency of the process for all parties involved, from the call for proposals to the decisions on funding. The handbook also contains the Fund's rules and other useful information, such as the rights and obligations for grant recipients. The handbook is published annually in conjunction with the call for proposals. For the handbook to serve its purpose, everyone involved in the process (applicants, Expert Panel members and external experts) are urged to read it in its entirety.

1 GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND

1.1 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). The role of the fund is to support scientific research and postgraduate research education in Iceland. To this end, the IRF supports clearly defined research projects of individuals, research groups, universities, research institutes and private enterprises. IRF also supports doctoral students at Icelandic universities. The IRF awards grants in accordance with the funding policy of the IRF as set down by the science board of the Science and Technology Policy Council.

1.2 BOARD OF DIRECTORS 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. 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 IRF and makes funding decisions based on the evaluations by Expert Panels.

1.3 HANDLING OF GRANTS

IRF staff at Rannís, provide support and advice on IRF grant-related queries Monday to Friday between 9:00-15:00. The IRF email is rannsoknasjodur@rannis.is.

1.4 ETHICS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Members of the IRF Board, members of Expert Panels, external experts, IRF staff and others that administratively handle applications to the IRF are bound by strict confidentiality. Applications, 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 made available to a third party. 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. IRF Expert Panel members understand and acknowledge that any disclosure or misappropriation of any of this 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 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

With regard to individual applications, the following leads to the disqualification of external experts, Expert Panel members and Board members of the IRF:

- General rules on conflict of interest as listed in the Administration Procedure Act (no 37/1993)
- If an Expert Panel member, Board member or external expert is a spouse, close relative, or close friend of the applicant.
- Personal conflicts exist between a panel member, Board member or external expert and an applicant.

- If an external expert, Expert Panel member or Board member is in professional competition with the applicant.
- Panel members can neither be principal investigators of an application to the IRF nor co-applicants of an application in the Expert Panel of which they are a member.
- External experts cannot be party to an IRF application in the same year that they serve as external experts.
- If a Board member is a participant in an application, the Board member must resign from his/her role in discussing the allocation of grants in the relevant grant year and a deputy Board member will take his/her place.

In the event of conflict of interest, external experts, Expert Panel members and Board members must recuse themselves from assessment of an application. External experts cannot undertake to assess the relevant application and Expert Panel members and Board members must recuse themselves from meetings while the relevant application is discussed, and a decision is reached regarding funding. Their absence in that case shall be recorded in meeting minutes.

If the relevant party is an employee of an institution or company, and an application from other employees of the same institution or company is under discussion, the closeness of the relationship with employees that are involved with the project and with the directors of the relevant institution must be assessed. This type of relationship does not by default lead to disqualification due to conflict of interest.

Board members, Expert Panel members and external experts are responsible for pointing out circumstances that might create a conflict of interest.

1.6 CODE OF CONDUCT FOR APPLICANTS AND PROCUREMENT OF REQUIRED PERMITS/APPROVALS

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. In such cases, the ethical issues in question and the way they will be handled shall be explicitly described in the application. Relevant permits/approvals must be obtained[1]. If an application for permit/approval is still being processed when the deadline for submitting applications to the IRF expires, this shall be noted in the application and the permit/approval shall be submitted to Rannís as soon as it is obtained. If the permit/approval is not obtained, it shall be reported to IRF. The IRF will not sign contracts for funded proposals until all required permits/approvals and authorizations have been secured.

The applicant must observe international agreements and regulations, e.g. regarding access to, utilization of, and exchange of biological material for research purposes, as well as intellectual property rights.

1.7 MISCONDUCT

Should suspicion of research misconduct, fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misappropriation in connection with an application or a funded project arise during the application process, during the funding period, or after the funding period of the project, the relevant party's institution and 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 evidence of research misconduct is found, the application will be rejected without a review and the applicant's institute will be held responsible for taking appropriate actions.

The IRF Board can initiate an independent investigation into cases of research misconduct.

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[1] The National Bioethics Committee (visindasidanefnd.is), The Data Protection Authority (personuvernd.is), Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority (mast.is)

1.8 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. Researchers who receive funding from the IRF must guarantee that their research findings will be available through open access by either publishing them in open access journals, or in open searchable, digital repositories along with publication in a traditional subscription 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 familiarize yourself with the rules of Rannís regarding repositories. The website opinvisindi.is provides repositories for Icelandic universities.

The rules on open access currently only apply to peer-reviewed texts published in scientific journals, not books or book chapters.

1.9 REFERRING TO THE GRANT IN PUBLICATIONS

Grantees are to explicitly reference the grant number and state that the project was funded by IRF in any publications of findings e.g.: *„This work was supported by the Icelandic Research Fund, grant number...".*

2 INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

2.1 TYPES OF GRANTS

The scope of the research fund is about 3.9 billion ISK a year, this amount is divided between new grants and commitments due to older grants. There are four grant types: Grants of Excellence, Project Grants, Postdoctoral Fellowship Grants and Doctoral Student Grants (Table 1), and these grants are awarded for up to 36 months.

Type of grant	Maximum length (in months)	Maximum amount (ISK)
Grant of Excellence	36	120,000,000
Project Grant	36	51,000,000
Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant	36	28,800,000
Doctoral Student Grant	36	19,200,000

Table 1. Grant types, maximum time and maximum amount of grants excluding overhead expenses and facilities.

International research collaboration is welcomed in the applications. Grants can, however, only be paid to bank accounts of Icelandic institutions or Icelandic companies. Funds from the IRF may be used for co-funding of international research projects with a similar focus.

Applications must meet all stated eligibility criteria. If it becomes clear during the application process that one or more of the eligibility criteria have not been met, the application is declared ineligible and is withdrawn from further evaluation.

Principal investigators must have completed their graduate studies at an accredited university. This does not apply to applicants for Doctoral Student Grants.

A principal investigator may submit only one application for each grant type. However, applications for different grant types may overlap. Thus, it is possible, for example, to submit separate applications for a Grant of Excellence and a Project Grant for projects with similar or overlapping aims, provided that there is a match between the scope of the project and the project budget in both applications. The same applies for other types of grants. The IRF will only fund one of the projects with overlapping aims.

Table 1 provides an overview of the different grant types. A fairly even cost distribution is expected over the grant period.

2.1.1 GRANTS OF EXCELLENCE

Grants of Excellence are intended for extensive research projects that are likely to establish Icelandic research as leading on an international level. Grants of Excellence are intended for research teams, and therefore the application shall include co-applicants or other participants in addition to a principal investigator(s). It is assumed that projects of excellence will involve training of young scientists with contributions from a graduate student and/or post-doctoral fellows. Confirmed collaboration with foreign scientists and institutions is likely to strengthen the application. Grants of Excellence are provided for up to 36 months. The maximum grant amount for a project 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 from IRF may fund up to 85% of the cost of a project.

2.1.2 PROJECT GRANTS

Project Grants are intended for miscellaneous research projects. It strengthens the Project Grant application if it includes work by graduate students and/or post-doctoral fellows. The maximum grant amount for a Project Grant is ISK 51 million for a 36-month project, ISK 34 million for a 24-month project, and ISK 17 million for a 12-month project. The grant may fund up to 85% of the total cost of the project.

2.1.3 POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP GRANT

The purpose of the Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant is to help young researchers to further their academic careers. 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 application, or alternatively be submitted by December 1, 2021. Special circumstances, such as parental leave or illnesses that prevented research activities, and are specified in the applicant's CV, may be considered as grounds for exceptions to this rule. The eligible applicant must have obtained an invitation from a host institution, preferably different from the institution awarding the doctoral degree, prior to the submission deadline. The maximum grant amount for projects is ISK 28,8 million for a 36-month project, ISK 19,2 million for a 24-month project, and ISK 9,6 million for a 12-month project. The grant from IRF may fund up to 100% of the total project cost. The applicant must explain how the fellowship fits with previous work of the applicant, how it will enhance his/her career development, and provide information about future research plans after the grant period. A Postdoctoral Fellowship is granted to an individual, and if that individual is hired into a salaried position during the grant period, the grant is revoked from the start date of the hiring.

2.1.4 DOCTORAL STUDENT GRANTS

Doctoral Student Grants are intended for doctoral students who apply under their own names. Applicants must have been admitted to doctoral studies at an Icelandic university. A confirmation of enrollment from the student registry shall accompany the application. The grants cover the students' salaries as well as travel costs for up to ISK 300 thousand per grant year. All other costs in relation to the project must be covered by the supervisor/institution. Doctoral Student Grants are provided for up to 36 months. The maximum grant amount is ISK 19,2 million for a 36-month project, ISK 12,8 million for a 24-month project, and ISK 6,4 million for a 12-month project. The grant from IRF may fund up to 100% of the total eligible project cost.

It is possible to apply for funding of salaries of doctoral students in Project Grants and Grants of Excellence, however the same student cannot receive funding for more than 12 person-months per year.

The doctoral degree must be awarded by an Icelandic university, but a joint degree with a foreign university is also allowed.

2.2 APPROVED EXPENSES

2.2.1 SALARIES

Grants can be used to cover salaries of researchers, graduate students, and research assistants. Participants may be unidentified when the application is submitted, but the role and person-months of all participants must be detailed in the budget if applying for their salaries. For a master's degree students, up to 12 person-months salary can be applied for. The IRF does not fund payment of salaries to parties who are also receiving full pay for other work (including pensioners), payments of overtime worked in research or payment to cover release from teaching duties.

2.2.2 OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

Applicants can apply for funding for operational expenses (does not apply for Doctoral Fellowship Grants). Operational expenses do not include overhead expenses and facilities, for example general office equipment such as computers. All operational expenses shall be itemized in the correct fields in the online submission system. Note that any unexplained cost will be rejected.

2.2.3 CONTRACTED SERVICES

Contracted services include work necessary for the project's progress but is not carried out by the participants in the project. All contracted services expenses shall be itemized in the online submission system. Tenders for contracted services shall be obtained before IRF signs a contract.

Contracted services are not included in the calculated overhead and facilities.

2.2.4 PURCASE OF EQUIPMENT

Equipment for up to ISK 2 million can be applied for. Price quotes shall be obtained before IRF signs a contract. Equipment costing more than 2 million can be applied for through the Infrastructure Fund.

2.2.5 PUBLICATION EXPENSES

Publication expenses up to ISK 500 thousand for Project Grants and Postdoctoral Fellowship Grants can be applied for. For Grants of Excellence the maximum amount is ISK 1 million. This sum can be distributed over the grant period.

2.2.6 TRAVEL EXPENSES

Travel expenses can include the total expenses of travels necessary for the progress of the project. All travel expenses must be clearly explained and justified in relation to the project goal(s).

2.2.7 OVERHEAD EXPENSES AND FACILITIES

In the online submission system, a 25% overhead is automatically calculated for all expenses, excluding contracted services.

Overhead expenses include costs related to, for example, office and research facilities, rent, utilities, support and auxiliary functions, purchases of literature, and purchases and maintenance of IT equipment and infrastructure such as computers. As the amount is added to the grant applied for, the total amount is higher than what is indicated as the maximum grant amount (see table 1.

2.2.8 OWN CONTRIBUTION

A minimum of 15% own contribution is demanded for Grants of Excellence and Project Grants. The IRF grant can cover up to 85% of a project's total costs. An exception from this rule are Postdoctoral Fellowships and Doctoral Student Grants where own contribution is not needed and the IRF covers up to 100% of the total cost.

2.3 WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE APPLICATION

An application must include the following sections:

A. Project Description, written into the IRF template for 2022, available in the electronic application system (a template is not provided for other documents)
B. Applicants´ CV (the Europass template is recommended)

The following should be included, where appropriate:

C. Letter of intent if "Other participants" are included in the application, i.e., confirming their role in the project. Declarations of support from individuals not contributing to the project should not be included.
D. Host declaration and
E. Doctoral diploma for Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant proposals
F. Confirmation of enrollment from the student registry for Doctoral Student Grant proposals

The evaluation of the application depends solely on the information supplied in the application form and relevant accompanying appendices. **No documents are accepted after the submission deadline. Applications with an incorrect template for the Project Description will be dismissed from the evaluation process; the same applies to** incomplete applications. Such dismissal can take place any time in the review process.

All applications must be submitted through the online submission system of Rannís.

Attachment A. Project description

The template for Project description is available in the online submission system of Rannís. Its settings and chapter headings should not be altered.

The template is by default set to Times/Times New Roman 12-point font, 1,5 line spacing, and 2,5 cm margins.

The form is divided into the following predefined sections.

a) Specific aims of the project, research questions/hypotheses, feasibility, originality, and impact
b) Present state of knowledge in the field
c) Research plan (time and work plan, methodology, milestones, present status of project, etc.) and deliverables. Refer to more detailed description of milestones and deliverables in the online submission system. Explain if permits are needed
d) Management and co-operation (domestic /foreign)
e) Proposed publication of results and data (including adherence to open access policy)
f) Contribution of doctoral and master's degree students to the project
g) Career development plan (for postdoctoral fellowship applications)

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the IRF rejects applications where the correct and template is not used.

Before the project description is uploaded into the online submission system, the list of references shall be detached and placed in a separate file. These two files are uploaded separately as pdf-files. The online submission system counts the number of pages in the project description file, but not in the bibliography. is

The maximum number of pages in the project description is:

• 20 pages for Grants of Excellence
• 15 pages for Project Grants
• 12 pages for Postdoctoral Fellowship Grants
• 5 pages for Doctoral Student Grants

The project description file also includes two pages: a title page and an instructions page. Therefore, the maximum number of pages that the online submission system accepts is:

• 22 pages for Grants of Excellence
• 17 pages for Project Grants
• 14 pages for Postdoctoral Fellowship Grants
• 7 pages for Doctoral Student Grants.

To facilitate the expert review of the application it is important that the project description is of good quality. The factors that are used for reference in the assessment can be viewed in the instructions for external experts (Section 5). The following points should be kept in mind:

• It is imperative that the project has well defined research questions/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, analysis and interpretation must be justified.

• Project milestones should be specified in the description. Regarding projects where funding is sought for two or three years, the milestones at the end of the first, second and third grant year shall be defined and described. Milestones and work packages in the online submission system can be referred to.

• Any collaboration within the project should be explained, both between the different scientists and researchers, and whether there is an active co-operation between universities, departments, institutions, and companies. International collaboration, if any, should be detailed separately.

• If applicable, information on which parts of the project are executed by doctoral or master's students should be included, as well as information on the department in which the students conduct their studies, and what the students' contribution to 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 and other scholarly publications, university diplomas, software,

databases, prototypes, production methods, new products, patents, models, research methods, supported scientific theories, etc.

- Furthermore, it should be explained in the application how the results will be promoted, as well as their publications in expert journals, reports, conferences, etc., and whether, and then how, the proprietary rights to the results will be protected. It shall be detailed how laws regarding open access to findings will be respected.

- Possible ethical considerations in carrying out the project shall be addressed.

Attachment B. Curriculum vitae

The CV shall include information on current employment status, education and training, supervision of graduate students, prior positions and awards, a list of relevant publications, and a link to a database of information on h-index or comparable. Any gaps in research activity due to sickness, parental leave or other reasons should be noted. The maximum length of the CV is 5 pages. Websites and homepages can be referred to for publications. The Europass template is recommended.

Attachment C. Letter of intent

A signed letter of intent from "Other participants" in the application, where it is specified what their role in the project will entail. A letter of intent is not needed from co-proposers as their CV is attached to the application and they are notified upon submission of application. A declaration of support from parties that do not have a role in the project will be dismissed.

Attachment D. Declaration from host institute

A letter of declaration from a host institute confirming that the applicant will have access to work facilities if the grant is awarded. This applies to Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant applications.

Attachment E. Doctoral degree certificate

This certificate must be submitted at the latest on December 1, 2021. This applies to Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant applications.

Attachment F. Confirmation of enrollment of doctoral students

A confirmation from the student registry of an Icelandic university, stating that the applicant has been enrolled in doctoral studies. This applies to Doctoral Student Grant applications.

2.4 TIMELINE

The call for proposal to the IRF is announced at least 6 weeks before the deadline. The expected time frame for processing of applications is described in Figure 1.
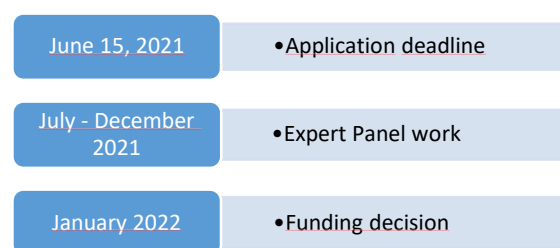
June 15, 2021	•Application deadline
July - December 2021	•Expert Panel work
January 2022	•Funding decision

Figure 1. Estimated time frames for the grant year 2022

2.5 REVIEW OF NEW APPLICATIONS

Applicants are advised to carefully read Sections 3-5: *Review process for new applications*, *Expert Panel guidelines*, and *External experts' guidelines*, where the evaluation criteria used by the Expert Panels and external experts are described.

2.6 IRF EXPERT PANELS

Seven Expert Panels will review applications for the grant year (table 2). The Science Board of the Science and Technology Policy Council appoints up to seven active scientists to make up each Expert Panel, they are selected for their expert knowledge in the relevant field. In the application form, the applicants select the Expert Panel in which they wish the application to be evaluated and they can select up to 3 additional scientific categories. Keywords can also specify the scientific category more precisely. The staff of Rannís can move an application between Expert Panels if recommended by the chairs of the panels. See Section 4: *Expert Panel guidelines*, for additional information on the work of Expert Panel members.

Questions regarding individual Expert Panels and scientific categories shall be directed to the IRF staff

at Rannís. Applicants may under no circumstances contact Expert Panel members during the evaluation process. If an applicant contacts an Expert Panel member, the application in question will be withdrawn from review.

Expert Panel	Scientific category
Physical sciences and mathematics	Physical sciences Chemical sciences Earth sciences Mathematics
Engineering and technical sciences	Engineering Computer sciences Technical sciences
Natural sciences	Biological sciences Other natural sciences (except earth sciences)
Biomedical sciences	Basic medicine Basic veterinary medicine Molecular- and cell biological sciences
Clinical sciences and public health	Public health Health sciences Other medical sciences
Social sciences, law, and educational sciences	Social sciences (sociology, political science, anthropology, ethnography, economics and business, psychology (other than clinical and physiological), human geography, tourism studies)) Law Educational sciences
Humanities and arts	Philosophy, ethics, and religion Arts (visual art, art history, performing arts, music) and design Languages and literature History and archaeology Other humanities

Table 2. IRF Expert Panels for the grant year 2022

2.7 MULTI-DISCIPLINARY PROPOSALS

Multi-disciplinary projects interweave subject matters, theories, and/or research methods from more than one discipline. When applying for a grant for a multi-disciplinary project, applicants should choose the Expert Panel which they consider best suited to consider the application but shall also explain the multi-disciplinary aspect of the project. For an application to be considered multi-disciplinary, it must include applicants with expertise in all disciplines identified in the application.

2.8 ANNOUNCEMENT TO RESEARCH MANAGER

When an application is submitted to the online submission system, the relevant research manager, or the party assigned to act in the research manager's place, is informed of the title and the number of the application, along with the name of the project leader and co-applicants.

3 EVALUATION PROCESS FOR APPLICATIONS

3.1 APPOINTMENT TO EXPERT PANELS

Expert Panel members are appointed by the Science Committee of the Icelandic Science and Technology Policy Council. Up to seven individuals with qualifications at associate professor level or higher, who have extensive experience of research, are appointed to each Expert Panel. At least two members of each Expert Panel shall be predominantly active professionally outside of Iceland. Expert Panel should be as balanced as possible, both in terms of gender and the disciplines that fall under the panel.

The Science Committee appoints one person from each panel to serve as chair. With the help of an IRF staff coordinator, the chair is responsible for coordinating the work of the Expert Panel and ensuring that it works in accordance with the IRF mandate and role, and in conformity with general rules regarding ethical conduct. When appointed, the Panels are made public on the website of Rannís.

3.2 PROCESSING OF APPLICATIONS

3.2.1 INITIAL SCREENING

All applications are screened by IRF staff at. Incomplete applications and applications where IRF rules (in this handbook) have not been followed are dismissed without further review, and the applicant is notified.

3.2.2 EXPERT ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS

All applications are assessed by the relevant Expert Panel, which seeks the opinions of two or more external experts for applications for Project Grants, Grants of Excellence and Postdoctoral Fellowship Grants. External experts are not needed for Doctoral Student Grants applications. The Expert Panel processes each application with a reasoned, written report and ranks applications based on the expert assessment (see Section 4: *Expert Panel guidelines*).

3.2.3 FUNDING DECISION

When the Expert Panel has finalized its review and ranking of applications, the chair of each panel meets with the IRF Board and gives an overview of the Expert Panel's deliberations and whether problems arose in the assessment of applications.

The Expert Panel chair covers in detail all applications that received an 'A' rating. Decisions on funding are taken by the IRF Board following presentations from Expert Panels. If necessary, the Board can solicit advice beyond that which the Expert Panels of the funds can provide. In addition to the Expert Panel review, the IRF Board must take into consideration the general policy of the Science and Technology Policy Council, the funding policy approved by the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council, and the annual budget of the fund. When allocations have been decided, applicants receive the decision by e-mail, along with the final assessment of the Expert Panel.

The Board's decisions on funding from the IRF are final. Under Art. 4 of Act No. 3/2003, the funding decisions of the IRF Board are not subject to administrative complaints.

3.3 AFTER RECEIVING FUNDS

3.3.1 GRANTS AWARDED

Information on awarded grants is published on Rannís' website, where information on previous grant decisions is also available.

3.3.2 DISTRIBUTION OF ANNUAL PAYMENTS FOR FUNDED PROJECTS

- First payment (40%) upon signing the grant agreement.
- Second payment (40%) to be paid in September.
- Final payment (20%) upon approval of the progress/final report.

3.3.3 PROGRESS REPORTS

The project leader is responsible for submitting annual reports and a final report. In the reports, the project's progress should be described, all major changes detailed (including sickness or parental leave), and alterations of the research plan supported. Transfer of funds between cost items exceeding 20% of the annual grant requires prior approval of the IRF Board. IRF's staff at has the authority to request further information and explanation from grantees and consult the respective Expert Panel if deemed necessary. The final payment, 20% of the annual sum, is paid upon approval of an annual or a final report. If the report

is not approved, the Board can withdraw the grant and request a repayment of the sum already paid to the project. Templates for both annual and final reports are found on the IRF's website.

Annual progress reports

The project leader is responsible for submitting the annual progress report no later than February 1st after the grant year in question. The annual report should include costs and finances based on the relevant grant year's budget and a cost estimate for the following grant year. All important changes in project costs shall be detailed, and any deviations from the research plan must be clearly justified. A report template is available on the IRF's website. A list of transactions of the project's accounting should accompany the report, along with a detailed budget overview available on the fund's website. . Note: grantees of Docotral Felloship Grants due not need to turn in lists of transactions.

Final reports

The project leader is responsible for submitting a final report, no later than February 15th, over a year after the conclusion of the project. The final report shall detail the work completed as part of the project, its final results, and conclusions, also any deviations from the original project plan. A report template is available on the IRF's website. A list of transactions of the project's accounting should accompany the report, along with a detailed budget overview available on the fund's website. . Note: grantees of Docotral Felloship Grants due not need to turn in lists of transactions.

4 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.

4.1 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.

4.2 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- and Postdoctoral Fellowship 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.

4.3 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 3.

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-A4), B and C. Sub-category A1 is reserved for top applications only.

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 3. Grades awarded by Expert Panels

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.

Grade	Review
5 - Excellent	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
4 - Very good	Very strong with only minor or negligible weaknesses
3 - Good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
2 - Moderate	Some strengths but at least one moderate weakness
1 - Poor	A few strengths and at least one major weakness

Table 4. Strength categories for external experts

5 EXTERNAL EXPERTS GUIDELINES

5.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

Project Grant applications and Postdoctoral Fellowship 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.

All external experts should read Section 1: *General information about the Icelandic Research Fund,* and Section 3: *Review process for new applications* in this handbook.

No fee is paid for the work of external experts.

5.1.1 NON-PREFERRED REVIEWERS

Applicants have an opportunity to specify in the application form which experts should not be involved in the assessment of the application and give the reasons for this. These experts ("Non-preferred reviewers") will not be contacted.

If applicants want to exclude reviewers who have previously assessed an application submitted to the fund, the ID-number of the external expert can

be used instead of the name. The ID-number is given in the external expert review for the previous application.

5.1.2 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.

5.2 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. Table 4 is used for reference in numerical assessment of each factor. 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.

Impact on career development (when evaluating Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant applications)

- How is the project relevant to the career plans of the applicant.

- Future cooperation with host institution.

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.