THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND'S HANDBOOK

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

2019

Version 4.0

Version 4.0

The Icelandic Research Fund board has approved the Handbook for 2019 (version 4.0).

Following are the main changes to version 3.0.

The main change to the Handbook in this current version is that chapters have been re-arranged with the goal of simplifying the presentation of information. For example, a section on eligibility has been deleted, and information related to eligibility included in relevant sections on the different grant types. In some cases, this necessitated minor changes in wording or the addition of text for further clarification.

Additions and clarifications:

External reviewers cannot be party to an IRF application in the same year that they serve as external reviewers (p. 2).

It is considered a strength if a project grant includes work by graduate students and/or doctoral students (p. 3).

A postdoctoral fellowship grant 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 that hire (p. 4).

Applicants for doctoral student grants may apply for one year of funding to finish doctoral studies that have been funded through other mechanisms for up to three years. In total, doctoral student grants will be awarded for up to 45 man-years of funding. (p. 5).

Applicants must confirm that they have used the correct project description template before submitting an application (p. 6).

Basic veterinary medicine has now been added as a sub-field of Biomedical Sciences in Table 2 (p. 8).

External reviewers will be informed if an applicant requests their anonymity to be lifted (p. 11).

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PREFACE

This is the fourth edition of the Icelandic Research Fund's handbook for applicants, Expert Panels and external reviewers, valid for the grant year 2019. The objective of this publication is to increase the transparency of the process for all parties involved, from the advertisement 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 for grant recipients. The handbook is published annually in conjunction with the advertised deadlines for submitting applications. For the handbook to serve its purpose, everyone involved with the process (applicants, Expert Panel members and external reviewers) 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 with later amendments). The role of the fund is to support scholarly 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 shall award grants in accordance with the general emphases of the Science and Technology Policy Council, the IRF's funding policy, and based on an expert assessment of the quality of research projects, the capability of the individuals carrying out the proposed research and their ability to devote time and effort to the project.[1]

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. 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 IRF and makes funding decisions based on evaluations by Expert Panels. General questions regarding the Fund and applications under review shall be directed to expert staff members of the IRF.

1.3 HANDLING OF GRANTS

Expert staff of the IRF at Rannís provide support and advice on grant-related queries between the hours of 9:00 - 16:00, Monday to Friday.

1.4 ETHICS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Members of the IRF Board, members of Expert Panels, external reviewers, IRF expert 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

In the event of conflict of interest, external reviewers, Expert Panel members and Board members must recuse themselves from assessment

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[1] http://www.vt.is/

of an application. External reviewers cannot undertake to assess the relevant application and Expert Panel members and Board members must recuse themselves from meetings where the relevant application is discussed and a decision is reached regarding funding. Their absence in that case shall be documented in meeting minutes. In addition to grounds for disqualification based on conflict of interest as listed in the Administration Procedure Act (no. 37/1993) [2] the following leads to disqualification of external reviewers, Expert Panel members and Board members of the IRF:

- If an Expert Panel member, Board member or external reviewer is a spouse, close relative or close friend of the applicant.
- Personal conflicts exist between a panel member, Board member or external reviewer and an applicant.
- If an external reviewer, 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 reviewers cannot be party to an IRF application in the same year that they serve as external reviewers
- 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.

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 automatically lead to disqualification due to conflict of interest.

Board members, Expert Panel members and external reviewers are responsible for identifying

circumstances that might create a conflict of interest that would influence their judgment of applications submitted to the IRF.

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. If the applicant believes that questions of ethical conduct of research are likely to arise during the course of the project, 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[3]. 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 experts. The IRF will not sign contracts for funded proposals until all required permits/approvals and authorizations have been secured.

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 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

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[2] http://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/1993037.html

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

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 is authorized to initiate an independent investigation into cases of research misconduct.

Research misconduct discovered during the application phase, or during or after the funding period, may result in the Board of the IRF 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.

1.8 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. (https://en.rannis.is/activities/open-access/). Opinvisindi.is provides repositories for Icelandic universities.

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 IRF in any publications of findings.

2 INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

2.1 TYPES OF GRANTS

The scope of the research fund is about 2.5 billion ISK a year, this amount is divided between new grants and commitments due to older grants. There are four grant types: project grants, grants of excellence, postdoctoral fellowship grants and doctoral student grants (Table 1), and these grants are awarded for up to 36 months.

International research collaboration and industrial partners are welcomed in applications. Grants can, however, only be paid to bank accounts of Icelandic institutions or 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 in order to be reviewed. 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 any further examination.

Principal investigators must have completed their graduate studies at an accredited university. This does not apply to applicants for doctoral student grants.

Projects that are the subject of grant applications of different 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 reserves the right to fund only one project with overlapping aims.

Table 1 provides an overview of the different grant types. A fairly even cost distribution is expected from one grant year to the next.

Type of grant	Maximum length (in months)	Maximum amount (ISK)
Grant of excellence	36	120,000,000
Project grant	36	45,000,000
Postdoctoral fellowship grant	36	24,000,000
Doctoral student grant	36	16,000,000

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

2.1.1 PROJECT GRANTS

Project grants are intended for research projects. It is considered a strength if a project grant application includes work by graduate students and/or post-doctoral fellows. The maximum grant amount for a project grant 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 grant from the IRF may fund up to 85% of the total cost of the project.

2.1.2 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/principal investigators. 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 the IRF may fund up to 85% of the cost of a project.

2.1.3 POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP GRANT

The purpose of the postdoctoral fellowship grant is to help young research scientists to develop 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, 2018. 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 24 million for a 36-month project, ISK 16 million for a 24 month project, and ISK 8 million for a 12-month project. The grant from the 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 grant 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 that hire.

2.1.4 DOCTORAL STUDENT GRANTS

Doctoral student grants are intended for doctoral students who apply under their own names. Applicants for doctoral student grants must have been admitted to doctoral studies at an Icelandic university and an attestation to that effect from the student registry of that university shall accompany the application. The grants cover the students' salaries as well as travel costs for up to 300,000 ISK 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 16 million for a 36-month project, ISK 10.6 million for a 24-month project, and ISK 5.3 million for a 12-month project. The grant from the 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 man-months per year.

The doctoral 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. Applicants for doctoral student grants may apply for one year of funding to finish doctoral studies that have been funded through other mechanisms for up to three years. In total, doctoral student grants will be awarded for up to 45 man-years of funding.

2.2 APPROVED EXPENSES

2.2.1 SALARIES

Grants can be used to fund salaries of researchers, graduate students and technical staff. Participating researchers may be unidentified at time of application, but work assignments for all persons involved in the project must be detailed in the budget if the application includes funding for their salaries. The IRF does not fund payments of overtime worked in research or payment of salaries to parties who are also receiving full pay for other work (including pensioners).

2.2.2 OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

Applicants can apply for funding for expenses due to necessary resources for the project, excluding items concerning overhead expenses and facilities, for example general office equipment such as computers. All operational expenses and expenses due to purchase of equipment shall be itemized in the correct field in the table. Note that all unexplained cost will be rejected.

Equipment for up to ISK 2 million can be included in each application as operational expenses. Price quotes from sellers in connection with equipment purchases shall accompany the application.

2.2.3 TRAVEL EXPENSES

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

2.2.4 CONTRACTED SERVICES

This item consists of work not carried out by the participants in the project, which is necessary for the project's progress. All expenses due to contracted services shall be itemized in the correct field in the

electronic application form. Tenders for contracted services shall accompany the application.

It is not possible to apply for financing of overhead expenses and facilities in relation to contracted services.

2.2.5 PUBLICATION EXPENSES

Publication costs of up to ISK 500,000 can be applied for under this item. It is not possible to apply for financing of overhead expenses and facilities in relation to publication expenses.

2.2.6 OVERHEAD EXPENSES AND FACILITIES

Applicants can apply for funding for financing overhead and facilities for up to 25% on top of total cost of the project, 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. This amount is added to the grant amount applied for, and therefore the total amount can be higher than what is indicated as the maximum grant amount (see table 1 and section 2.1).

2.3 WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE APPLICATION

An application must include the following sections:

• A Project Description in the format of the 2019 template, available in the online application system.

• Applicant CV

The following should be included, where appropriate:

• A letter of intent from other participants (if applicable)

• Host declaration and doctoral diploma for postdoctoral fellowship proposals

• Confirmation of acceptance into a doctoral program for doctoral proposals

• Quotes for equipment purchases and/or contracted services (if applicable)

The review of the application will solely be based on the information supplied in the application and relevant accompanying appendices. **No documents are accepted after the closing of the application deadline.** Applications with incorrect templates for the Project Description (Attachment A) will be rejected from the review process. Incomplete applications will be rejected at any time in the review process.

All applications must be submitted through the electronic application system of Rannís.

Attachment A. Project description

A template for this attachment is available on the electronic application system of Rannís.

The template is set by default to Times/Times New Roman 12 point font, 1,5 line spacing, and 2,5 cm. margins. These settings should not be altered.

The form is divided into the following predefined sections, which should not be altered.

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. Explain if consents and/or permits are needed
d) Management and co-operation (domestic/foreign)
e) Proposed publication of results and data storage (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 applications, the IRF reserves the right to reject all applications that are not completed using the correct and most up-to-date form and template. Applicants must confirm that they have used the correct template before submitting.

Before the project description is uploaded into the application system, the list of references shall be detached and placed in a separate file. These two files shall be uploaded separately as pdf-files. The application system counts the number of pages of the file containing the project description, but the pages of the file containing the bibliography will not be counted. The project description itself shall not be more than 20 pages for grants of excellence, 15 pages for project grants, 12 pages for postdoctoral fellowship grants and 5 pages for doctoral student grants. The project description file also includes two pages: a title page and an instructions page. The maximum page number that the online application system will accept for the project description files (excluding bibliography but including title page and instructions page) is therefore 22 pages for grants of excellence, 17 pages for project grants, 14 pages for postdoctoral fellowship grants, and 7 pages for doctoral student grants.

In order 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 reviewers (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. With regard to 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.
- 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.

- Information, if applicable, 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 would be promoted, as well as their publications in expert journals, reports, conferences, etc., and whether, and then how, the proprietary rights to the results would be protected. The manner in which laws regarding open access to findings will be respected shall be detailed.
- Possible ethical considerations in carrying out the project should 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 CV should ideally be succinct, and not detail information that is irrelevant to the evaluation of the application.

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.

Attachment D. Declaration from host institute

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

Attachment E. Doctoral degree certificate

This certificate must be submitted on or before December 1, 2018. This applies to postdoctoral fellowship grant applications.

Attachment F. Confirmation of acceptance of doctoral students

A confirmation from the student registry of an Icelandic university, stating that the applicant has been accepted for doctoral studies. This applies to doctoral student grant applications.

Attachment G. Price quote

If equipment costs and/or cost of contracted services are applied for, price quotes must accompany the proposal.

2.4 TIMELINE

The call for grant applications to the IRF is announced at least 6 weeks before the deadline. The expected time frame for the processing of applications for the grant year is described in Figure 1.

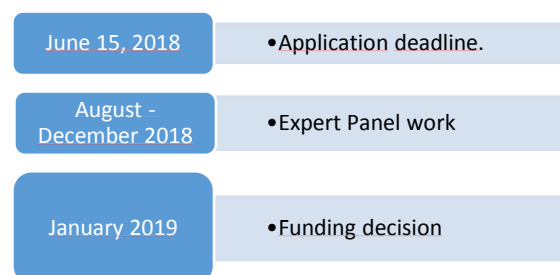| June 15, 2018 | • Application deadline. |
| August - December 2018 | • Expert Panel work |
| January 2019 | • Funding decision |

Figure 1. Estimated time frames for the grant year 2019.

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 reviewer guidelines*, where the evaluation criteria used by the Expert Panels and external reviewers are described.

Expert Panel	Scientific category
Physical sciences and mathematics	Physical sciences Chemical sciences Nano-technology Earth and related environmental sciences Mathematics
Engineering and technical sciences	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
Natural and environmental sciences	Biological sciences (plant sciences, botany, zoology, ornithology, entomology, behavioral 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
Biomedical sciences	Basic medicine Basic veterinary medicine Biological sciences (cell biology, immunology, microbiology, virology, biochemistry, molecular biology, biochemical research methods, mycology, biophysics, genetic and heredity)
Clinical sciences and public health	Clinical medicine Public health Health sciences Other medical sciences Health biotechnology
Social sciences and educational sciences	Economics and business Educational sciences Law Other social sciences Political Science Social and economic geography Psychology Media and communications Sociology
Humanities and arts	History and archaeology Languages and literature Art (arts, history of arts, performing arts, music) Other humanities Philosophy, ethics and religion

Table 2. IRF Expert Panels for the grant year 2019

2.6 IRF EXPERT PANELS

Seven Expert Panels will review applications for the grant year 2019 (table 2). Seven active scientists make up each Expert Panel, and 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. The staff of Rannís may suggest a different Expert Panel for an application, but no application is transferred to another Expert panel without explicit prior consent from the principal investigator. 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 staff of Rannís. Applicants may under no circumstances be in contact with Expert Panel members during the review process.

2.7 PLURIDISCIPLINARY (MULTI-, INTER-, AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY) PROPOSALS

Pluridisciplinary projects interweave subject matters, theories, and/or research methods from more than one discipline. When applying for a grant for a pluridisciplinary project, applicants should choose the Expert Panel which they consider best suited to consider the application, but shall also indicate other relevant disciplines that will be considered in the selection of external reviewers. In order for an application to be considered pluridisciplinary, 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 application system, the relevant research manager, or the party assigned to act in the research manager's place, shall be provided with information about the name and number of the application, along with the name of the principal investigator.

3 REVIEW PROCESS FOR NEW APPLICATIONS

3.1 APPOINTMENTS 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. When appointing Expert Panel members, it should be endeavored to have members with expertise that represents the breadth of disciplines in the panel, and to ensure as equal a gender distribution of members as possible.

The Science Committee appoints one person from each of the panels to serve as chair for that panel. The chair is responsible, with the help of the expert staff member from Rannís assigned to the panel, for coordinating the work of the Expert Panel and ensuring that the Panel 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 the relevant expert staff member from Rannís. Incomplete applications and applications where IRF rules (in this handbook) have not been followed are rejected without further review, and the applicant is notified of that outcome.

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 reviewers for applications for project grants, grants of excellence and postdoctoral fellowships. Doctoral student applications are assessed within the Expert Panel. 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 a decision in e-mail containing 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 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 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 principal investigator is responsible for submitting an annual progress report by January 15th following each grant year, and a final report within one year of the end of the final grant year. The reports are reviewed by the staff of Rannís, who makes recommendations on continued funding to the IRF Board. The staff members of Rannís have the authority to request further information and explanatory notes from grantees 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. Formats for annual reports and final reports can be found on the IRF website.

Annual progress reports

In the annual progress report, costs and finances based on the relevant grant year's budget and a cost estimate for the following grant year shall be submitted. All important changes in project costs shall be detailed (including family or extended sick leave), 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. An itemized table or list of transactions (debits and credits) in the grant accounting shall accompany the annual progress report. A template for annual progress reports is available on the IRF website.

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 summary of costs (itemized table and list of transactions) shall accompany the report and state any deviations from the original budget. A template for final reports is available on the IRF website.

4 EXPERT PANEL GUIDELINES

The role of the IRF Expert Panels is to review applications 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 THE REVIEW PROCESS

Expert Panel members receive a list of applications, along with abstracts and names of applicants. The Expert Panel members then indicate which applications they can review, and which applications they cannot review due to conflict of interest. The applications received by the Expert Panel are divided amongst panel members. Each application is then assigned to three readers within the Expert Panel, but all members are encouraged

to review all applications assigned to their respective Expert Panels. The first reader is responsible for finding external reviewers to assess the application, at least two experts for project grant applications and postdoctoral fellowship applications, and three experts for applications for grants of excellence. External reviewers shall be professionally active outside of Iceland. The selection of external reviewers 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 reviewers and applicants. External reviewers must then confirm that there is no conflict of interest. Applicants have an opportunity to specify on the application form which experts should not be involved in the assessment of the application and give the reasons for this. Experts whom applicants have identified in their application as "Non-preferred reviewers" will not be contacted.

When an external reviewer has agreed on reviewing an application, the Expert Panel member notifies Rannís, and external experts are provided with 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 reviewers 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.

4.2 ONLINE REVIEW SYSTEM

Each Expert Panel member gets access to 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 accessing the applications. Expert Panel members do not get access to grant applications where they have declared conflict of interest.

4.3 EXPERT PANEL MEETINGS

Before Expert Panel meetings

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

Grade	Review
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
C	Low Impact – Not recommended for further consideration. A few strengths and at least one major weakness

Table 3. Grades awarded by Expert Panels.

In Expert Panel meetings

During the Expert Panel meetings, the first readers present their respective applications, briefly introduce the background of the external reviewers, present the external reviewers' 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.

Expert Panel members who have recused themselves due to conflicts of interest with regard to an application shall leave the meeting when the relevant application is discussed, and this shall be entered into the meeting minutes by the expert staff member from Rannís assigned to the panel. 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.

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. Generally, no more than 5% of applications are expected to reach the grade A1, and approximately 10% a grade of A2. In Expert Panel meetings, Expert Panel reviews are finalized.

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 via email, and the final grade is confirmed or altered based on the outcome of those discussions.

5 EXTERNAL REVIEWER GUIDELINES

5.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

Project grant applications and postdoctoral fellowship applications are generally reviewed by two external reviewers. Grants of excellence are evaluated by at least three external reviewers.

Within each Expert Panel, applications are ranked based on external evaluations and discussions within the panel. The ranking list is presented to the IRF Board for a final decision on awards.

All reviewers engaged in reviewing applications for the IRF are required to 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 reviewers.

5.1.1 REVIEWERS' ANONYMITY

According to the Information Act (no. 140/2012), Rannís may not refuse to provide applicants with the names of reviewers but such information is only

provided if specifically requested. External reviewers will be informed if an applicant requests their anonymity to be lifted.

5.1.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

External reviewers are responsible for identifying any circumstances which constitute a conflict of interest for them when it comes to reviewing applications to the IRF. External reviewers must confirm the absence of conflict of interest prior to being granted access to the application.

5.2 EXTERNAL REVIEWERS – GUIDELINES

The external reviewer review sheet is divided into four parts:

PART 1 – Application
This part contains the application 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 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.
- Clearly specified aims.
- Feasibility and importance of the project. Project plan, work packages, milestones and deliverables.

Principal investigator and other parties involved
- Relevant knowledge, experience and qualifications of the principal investigator and other participants in the field of the project.
- 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 applications)
- Project relevance to career plans of applicant.
- Future cooperation with host institution.

PART 3 – Summary
A summary of strength and weaknesses.

PART 4 – Submit
In this section, external reviewers can access a printable overview of the review for confirmation. Upon confirmation, the review is stored in the database of Rannís and becomes accessible to Expert Panel members.

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 reviewers.

APPENDIX 1

IRF allocation policy

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Approved by the science committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council in May 2016 for publication in its entirety with the Fund's allocation rules.

By amendment to Act no. 3/2003 on Public Support for Scientific Research, the Icelandic Research Fund and the Icelandic research study fund (Rannsóknarnámssjóður) were combined under the name Rannsóknasjóður (IRF). In Article 2 of the Act it is stated: "The role of the Research Fund shall be to support scholarly research in Iceland. To this end, the Fund supports clearly defined research projects of individuals, research groups, universities, research institutes and private enterprises. The Research Fund shall award grants in accordance with the general emphases of the Science and Technology Policy Council and on the basis of an expert assessment of the quality of research projects, the capability of the individuals carrying out the research and their ability to devote time and effort to the project. A decision on a grant allocation must be based on the expert assessment."

The role of the science committee with regard to the allocation policy of the IRF is described in Article 6 of Act no. 3/2003 on Public Support for Scientific Research, as amended. Therein it is stated: "The Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council shall define the policy of the Research Fund and Equipment Fund on allocations. The Board of these Funds shall publish rules on applications, their processing and grant awards no later than six weeks prior to the deadline for the application, and present them to the Minister of Education, Science and Technology. The rules must specify the conditions for applications and the emphases of the Science and Technology Policy Council."

The Science and Technology Policy Council was created by Act no. 3/2003 on Public Support for Scientific Research. The Council is appointed for terms of three years at a time and formulates government policy during each term of office. The Council shall work according to a plan for the period 2014-2016. However, the Science Committee would like to reaffirm the emphasis which the previous council placed on taking into consideration quality and results when allocating public funds from competitive research fund.

The IRF awards grants in accordance with the provisions of Act no. 3/2003, as amended, and in accordance with the policy of the Science and Technology Policy Council. The Science Committee emphasizes the importance of the following factors in the assessment of applications:

- Research projects shall be funded based on quality, which is assessed according to scientific merit and the applicant's skills and access to facilities, and the likelihood of the project delivering measurable results and gains.
- Projects that conform to quality criteria and are executed in active cooperation between companies, universities, academic fields and institutions, shall in general have priority when it comes to grants from competitive research funds.
- Particular consideration shall be given to
  o Early career support of emerging scientists and that the fund pays special attention to supporting young scientists.
  o Gender balance in the ranks of scientists and that the fund strives to ensure gender equality.
- The Fund can consider the circumstances of applicants, whether they work independently or in universities, institutions or companies. This refers to, among other things, that applicants may have varied access to students in research-related studies.

The findings of studies that are funded with grants from the IRF shall be published in open access and available to everyone unless otherwise agreed.