HANDBOOK

THE DOCTORAL STUDENT FUND OF THE MINISTRY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

To support research on the interplay of land use and climate

RULES FOR

APPLICANTS AND EXPERT PANEL

2021

rannís

Contents

PREFACE

This is the Doctoral student fund of the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources handbook for applicants and Expert Panels; valid for the grant year 2021. 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 and Expert Panel members) are urged to read it in its entirety.

1 GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 ROLE

The Doctoral student fund of the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources 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 fund supports doctoral students studying natural sciences. Grants are awarded in accordance with the funding policy of the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources and based on the scientific value of the project, the applicants´ qualifications to carry out the project and the suitability of the research facilities.

1.2 AIMS AND GOALS

Land use, e.g. grazing, conservation, forestry and land reclamation, affects ecological processes of nature. These processes are i.e. species composition and biomass of plants and animals (energy cycle), water and nutrient cycle, conversion of organic matter and nature of carbon . They control carbon emissions and binding in the ecosystem as well as the rate of carbon emissions and binding. Current knowledge on the nature and interplay of these processes is scarce and basic research is called for. Research in this area is a perquisite for Iceland to achieve its goals in tackling climate change, and to make it possible to systematically protect and restore ecosystems.

1.3 GRANT CATEGORIES

Three categories with defined aims and goals are defined. Emphasis is placed on research in three categories in the following order of priority:

1.3.1 CATEGORY 1

The aim is to promote knowledge on the ecological processes that are shaped by land use and affect carbon emissions/binding.

1. How land use affects ecological processes, e.g., through its' effect on biodiversity.
2. What type of land use affects biological processes.
3. Research on carbon flow e.g., using eddy covariance technique, which provides data on carbon emissions/binding of ecosystems, not least in soil.
4. Development of methods that maximize carbon binding and maintain carbon pools.

1.3.2 CATEGORY 2

The aim is to promote knowledge on adaptation to climate change:

1. Genetic adaptation of trees and other species to possible changes in climate and implement measures to rescue and/or move species and/or make changes to species composition.
2. Adaptation of methods and goals, e.g., in forestry and land reclamation.
3. Impact of changes in land use and ecological processes on carbon emissions/binding.

1.3.3 CATEGORY 3

The aim is to promote knowledge on the use of remote sensing data to study the carbon status of different ecosystems:

1. Development of methods for determine the state of ecosystems in relation to the carbon status of the ecosystem.
2. Development of methods to identify the various properties of ecosystems that affect carbon emissions/binding.
3. Development of methods to determine carbon emission/binding of ecosystems.

1.4 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Minister of Environment and Natural Resources appoints a four-member Board for a period of three years. 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 fund and makes funding decisions based on the evaluations of the Expert Panel.

1.5 ETHICS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Members of the Board, members of the Expert Panel and Rannís staff and others that administratively handle applications to the fund 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. 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.

1.6 RULES REGARDING CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Regarding individual applications, the following leads to the disqualification of Expert Panel members and Board members:

- General rules on conflict of interest as listed in the Administration Procedure Act (no 37/1993)

- If an Expert Panel member or Board is a spouse, close relative, or close friend of the applicant.
- Personal conflicts exist between a panel member, Board member or an applicant.
- If an 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 nor co-applicants of an application.
- 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, Expert Panel members and Board members must recuse themselves from assessment of an application. 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 and Expert Panel members are responsible for pointing out circumstances that might create a conflict of interest.

1.7 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 submission deadline for to the fund expires, this shall be noted in the

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

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 Rannís staff. The fund 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.

1.8 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 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 investigate. 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 Board can initiate an independent investigation into cases of research misconduct.

1.9 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 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.

Grantees are to explicitly reference the grant number and state that the project was funded by the fund in any publications of findings e.g.: *„This work was supported by the Doctoral Student Fund of the Ministry for Environment and Natural Resources, grant number...".*

2 INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

2.1 TYPES OF GRANTS

The fund´s grants are intended for doctoral student who apply in their own name. 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 grant covers student salary, up to 300.000 ISK for travel cost and up to 6.400.000 ISK for operating expenses. The scope of the fund is approximately 97 million ISK.

Type of grant	Maximum length (in months)	Maximum amount (ISK)
Doctoral Student Grant	36	25,900,000

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. Grants from the fund 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.

Grants are provided for up to 36 months. The maximum grant amount is 25.9 million ISK for a 36-month project, 17.3 million for a 24-month project and 8.6 million for a 12-month project. The grant may fund up to 100% of the total cost of the project.

It is possible to apply for funding of salaries of doctoral students in Project Grants and Grants of Excellence of The Icelandic Research Fund, 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

The fund covers salaries of doctoral students conducting studies on the interplay of land use and climate.

2.2.2 OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

Applicants can apply for funding for operational expenses, up to 6.4 million ISK. 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 TRAVELEXPENSES

Travel expenses, up to 300.000 ISK, can be applied for. 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.

2.3 WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE APPLICATION

An application must include the following sections:

A. Project Description, written into the fund´s template for 2021, available in the Rannís online submission system (a template is not provided for other documents)
B. Applicants´ CV (the Europass template is recommended)

Confirmation of enrollment from the student registry 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)

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

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 5. 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 7.

To facilitate the expert review of the application it is important that the project description is of good quality. 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 education and training, a list of relevant publications. 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. 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.

2.4 TIMELINE

The call for proposal to the fund is announced at least 5 weeks before the deadline. The expected time frame for processing of applications is described in Figure 1.
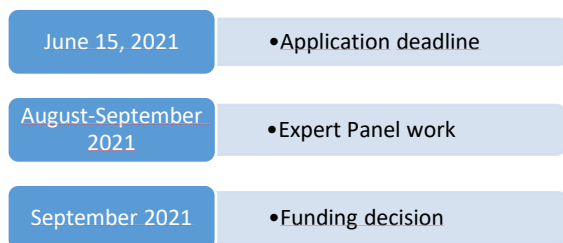

June 15, 2021	• Application deadline
August-September 2021	• Expert Panel work
September 2021	• Funding decision

Figure 1. Estimated time frames for the grant year 2021

2.5 REVIEW OF NEW APPLICATIONS

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

2.6 EXPERT PANELS

Expert Panels will review applications for the grant year. The Board appoints five active scientists to the Expert Panel, they are selected for their expert knowledge in the relevant field. When appointed, the Panels are made public on the website of Rannís. See Section 4: *Expert Panel guidelines*, for additional information on the work of Expert Panel members.

Questions regarding the Expert Panel shall be directed to the 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.

2.7 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 principal investigator.

3 EVALUATION PROCESS FOR APPLICATIONS

3.1 APPOINTMENT TO EXPERT PANELS

Expert Panel members are appointed by the Board. Five individuals with qualifications at associate professor level or higher, who have extensive experience of research, are appointed to the Expert Panel. Expert Panel should be as balanced as possible, both in terms of gender and the disciplines.

The Board appoints one person from each panel to serve as chair. With the help of a Rannís staff coordinator, the chair is responsible for coordinating the work of the Expert Panel and ensuring that it works in accordance with the funds´ 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 Rannís staff. Incomplete applications and applications where the funds´ 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 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 Expert Panel chair meets with the 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 Board following presentations from the Expert Panel. 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 Board must take into consideration the general the funding policy approved by the Ministry of

Environment and Natural Resources, 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 are final. Under Art. 4 of Act No. 3/2003, the funding decisions of the 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.

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 May 2022.
- Final payment (20%) upon approval of the progress/final report.

3.3.3 PROGRESS REPORTS

The applicant 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 Board. The fund´s staff 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 fund´s website.

Annual progress reports

The project leader is responsible for submitting the annual progress report no later than November 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 fund´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.

Final reports

The applicant is responsible for submitting a final report, no later than November 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 fund´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.

4 EXPERT PANEL GUIDELINES

The role of the Expert Panel is to evaluate applications submitted to the fund 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 Panel establishes 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 fund´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.

When the readers of 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 evaluations from the second and third readers.

At Expert Panel meetings

During the Expert Panel meetings, the editors present their respective applications and 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 Rannís 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 Panel

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.