

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

2017

2nd Edition

Version 2.0 – Grant Year 2017

Below, major changes to the Handbook for the grant year 2017 are underlined

Grants of excellence and Project grants

The same individual may apply for any number of grants as a PI with similar or overlapping aims, provided that there is a match between the scope of the project and the project budget

To illustrate, a PI may submit separate applications for a Grant of Excellence and a Project grant with similar or overlapping aims, provided that there is a match between the scope of the project and the project budget in each application. The IRF reserves the right to fund only one of the applications in cases where a PI submits two or more applications with similar or overlapping aims.

Grants of excellence are awarded to large-scale projects that will result in research of high international calibre. Grants of excellence fund activities of research teams, and thus co-applicants are required in addition to a principal investigator/principal investigators. The project should involve contributions by a graduate student or students. Confirmed international collaboration in an application for a Grant of Excellence is likely to strengthen the application.

Postdoctoral Fellowships

A copy of the doctoral degree certificate shall accompany the proposal, or alternatively be submitted by December 1, 2016.

Doctoral student grants

Applicants for a Doctoral student grant must have been accepted into the doctoral programme specified in the application at the time of submission deadline. A formal letter from the Student Registration Office (or comparable office) confirming acceptance to the program must accompany the application.

Appendices

A template for appendix A is available in the Rannís electronic proposal system. The form is divided into predefined sections, which should not be altered. When all information has been entered, applicants are asked to separate appendix A into two documents: 1) *Project description*, and 2) *Bibliography*, and then upload the two documents separately as pdf files. In the electronic proposal system, the number of pages in the *Project description* section is automatically counted, but not in the *Bibliography* section. The page limit (Times/Times New Roman 12 pt. font with 1.5 line spacing and 2,5 cm page margins) for the *Project description* section of the application (including title page and guidelines) is 22 pages for Grant of Excellence applications; 17 pages for Project grant applications; 14 pages for Postdoctoral fellowship grant applications; and 7 pages for Doctoral student grant applications. To ensure equal treatment of applications, the IRF reserves the right to reject all applications that are not completed using the most current version of the template for Appendix A.

The Project description 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. Any consents and/or permits that need to be sought for conducting the research should be detailed here.
- d) Management and co-operation (domestic/foreign)
- e) Proposed publication of results and data storage (including open access policy)

- f) Contribution of doctoral and master's degree students to the project
 - g) Career development plan (for Postdoctoral fellowship applications)
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- Possible ethical considerations in carrying out the project should be addressed.

Pluridisciplinary proposals

Pluridisciplinary proposals interweave subject matters, theories, and/or research methods from more than one discipline. When submitting a pluridisciplinary proposal, applicants are asked to indicate all relevant expert panels, identifying one as a preferred "home" panel. These selections will inform the selection of external reviewers. In order for an application to be considered pluridisciplinary, it must include applicants with expertise in all identified disciplines.

Operational costs

This item consists of the total sum of all the necessary supplies for the project, with the exception of costs associated with contracted services, overhead, and facilities.

Overhead 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 and equipment cost. 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.

Distribution of annual payments of granted projects

- First payment (40%) upon signing the grant agreement.
- Second payment (40%) to be paid on June 1.
- Final payment (20%) upon approval of the annual/final report.

Rannís will not sign contracts for successful applications until all required permits and authorizations have been secured.

Disclaimer:

This IRF Handbook 2017 is available in both Icelandic and English. If there are any discrepancies between the Icelandic and the English version the Icelandic version is the correct one.

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PREFACE

This is the second edition of The Icelandic Research Fund (IRF) handbook for applicants, expert panels and external reviewers. The objective of this publication is to increase the transparency of the process for all parties involved in IRF's activities. The handbook also contains the fund's rules and describes procedures and obligations for grant recipients. The handbook is published in connection with the IRF annual call. For the document to serve its purpose, applicants, expert panel members and external reviewers are urged to review the entire document.

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)¹. The role of the fund is to enhance scientific research and postgraduate research education in Iceland. To achieve that purpose, the IRF awards funding for postgraduate students in research-related programs of study and for research projects led by individuals, research teams, universities, research institutes, and organisations according to the general priorities of the Science and Technology Policy Council², the funding policy of the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council, and based on peer review of the proposed research projects, the capability of the applicants, and the available research facilities.

1.2 THE BOARD 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 Rannís website. The

Board issues rules and guidelines for the IRF and makes funding decisions on applications based on evaluations by expert panels. General questions regarding the Fund and proposals under review are handled by Rannís staff.

1.3 GRANTS MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Rannís staff provide support and advice on grant-related queries. Rannís hours are, 9:00-16:00, Monday-Friday.

1.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN HANDLING APPLICATIONS

Members of the IRF Board, members of expert panels, external reviewers, programme officers and others handling applications to the IRF are bound by strict confidentiality. Proposals, 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 final review sheet will be stored in the Rannís electronic registry, and all other confidential information shall be destroyed. 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 owner is to be in addition to remedies otherwise available to owner at law or in equity.

1.5 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

In the event of conflict of interest, external reviewers, expert panel members or Board members must recuse themselves from assessment of a proposal. Expert panel members and Board

¹ In Icelandic

² <http://www.vt.is/>

members shall not be present for discussions or decisions regarding a proposal in cases of conflict of interest. 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) ³ the following leads to disqualification of external reviewers, expert panel members and Board members of the IRF:

- If a panel member, Board member or external reviewer is a spouse, close relative or close friend of the applicant.
- Personal conflicts between a panel member, Board member or external reviewer and an applicant.
- If a panel member or Board member is a professional competitor of the applicant.
- Panel members cannot be principal investigators of a proposal to the IRF.
- If a Board member is a participant in a grant proposal. In such cases, the interested Board member is asked to resign from his/her position in the affiliate and a deputy board member will take his/her place.

Disqualification on grounds of conflict of interest of a panel member or a Board member who is employed at the same institution or company as an applicant depends on the closeness of their relationship. This type of relation does not automatically lead to disqualification.

Board members, expert panel members and external reviewers are responsible for identifying circumstances that might influence their judgment of proposals, thus ensuring that conflicts of interest will not arise.

1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR APPLICANTS AND SEEKING APPROPRIATE PERMITS AND CONSENTS

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 for the project, the ethical issues in question and the way they will be handled shall be explicitly described in the application. When appropriate, consent must also be obtained from the relevant research ethics panel⁴. If consent is needed and has not been approved when the application is submitted, it should be specifically noted in the application. Rannís will not sign contracts for successful applications until all required permits 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.

1.7 RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

Should suspicion of research misconduct, fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misappropriation by the principal investigator of an application or a funded project arise during the application process, review process, funding period, or after the funding period of the project, the principal investigator's institution, as well as 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

³ <http://eng.forsaetisraduneyti.is/acts-of-law/nr/17>

⁴ The National Bioethics Committee (visindasidanefnd.is), The Data Protection Authority (personuvernd.is), Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority (mast.is)

misconduct is found, the application will be rejected without a review and the principal investigator's institute made 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 will be reported to the principal investigator's institution and the Board of the IRF. The Board of the IRF may demand that the principal investigator repay the grant funds obtained to that point, and decide on specific restrictions regarding future submissions.

2 GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

2.1 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

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

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 proposal, or alternatively be submitted by December 1, 2016. Special circumstances, such as parental leave or illnesses that prevented research activities after the degree was received, and are specified in the applicant's CV, may be considered as grounds for exceptions to this rule.

Applicants for a Doctoral student grant must have been accepted into the doctoral programme specified in the application at the time of submission deadline. A formal letter from the Student Registration Office (or comparable office) confirming acceptance to the program must accompany the application.

International research collaboration and industrial partners are welcomed in applications. Grants can, however, only be administered by Icelandic universities, research institutes, and companies.

Funds from the IRF may be used for co-funding of international research projects with a similar focus.

Proposals must meet all stated eligibility criteria in order to be reviewed. If it becomes clear before, during or after the peer review evaluation phase, that one or more of the eligibility criteria have not been met, the proposal is declared ineligible and is withdrawn from any further examination.

2.2 EVALUATION OF NEW PROPOSALS

Applicants are advised to carefully read sections 4-6 *The review process*, *The Expert panel guidelines*, and *The External review-guidelines*, where the evaluation criteria used by the expert panels and external reviewers are described. It should be especially noted that reviews are based solely on information provided in the applications themselves and accompanying documents.

In the application form, the applicants select the expert panel in which they wish the proposal to be evaluated. Rannís staff may suggest a different expert panel for a proposal, but no proposal is transferred between expert panels without explicit prior consent from the principal investigator.

2.3 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 in open access, unless otherwise agreed upon. Researchers who receive funding from IRF must guarantee that their research findings will be available through open access. Researchers may either publish in open access journals, or in open searchable, digital repositories along with publication in a traditional subscription journal⁵. The final peer reviewed manuscript shall be returned to the repository immediately after the article has been accepted for publication. If the

⁵ For further information contact Rannís

journal demands a waiting period prior to open access, the grantee shall upon submission of manuscript to repository specify that the article shall be made available for public access automatically when the waiting period expires.

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 the Icelandic Research Fund in any publications arising from the project by and.

3 ANNUAL CALL 2017

3.1 TIME FRAME OF THE CALL

The call for grant applications to the IRF is announced on the Rannís website at least 6 weeks before the deadline. The expected time frame of the call for grant year 2017 is described in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The expected time frame of the annual call for grant year 2017.

3.2 TYPES OF GRANTS

In the annual call for the grant year 2017, there are four grant types; Grant of Excellence, Project grant, Postdoctoral fellowship grant and Doctoral student grant. These grants are awarded for up to three years (Table 1).

The same individual may apply for any number of grants as a PI with similar or overlapping aims, provided that there is a match between the scope of the project and the project budget

To illustrate, a PI may submit separate applications for a Grant of Excellence and a Project grant 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 IRF reserves the right to fund only one of the applications in cases where a PI submits two or more applications with similar or overlapping aims.

Table 1. Grant types and maximum amount that can be applied for in the annual call for grant year 2017.

Grant type	Maximum length in months	Maximum amount (ISK)
Grant of excellence	36	120.000.000
Project grant	36	45.000.000
Postdoctoral fellowship grant	36	21.000.000
Doctoral student grant	36	15.000.000

A fairly even cost distribution is expected from one grant year to the next

3.2.1 GRANT OF EXCELLENCE

Grants of excellence are awarded to large-scale projects that will result in research of high international calibre. Grants of excellence fund activities of research teams, and thus co-applicants are required in addition to a principal investigator/principal investigators. The project should involve contributions by a graduate student or students. Confirmed international collaboration in an application for a Grant of Excellence is likely to strengthen the application. The maximum grant amount for Grants of excellence 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 of excellence may fund up to 85% of the total cost of the project.

3.2.2 PROJECT GRANT

The maximum grant amount for a Project grants 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 Project grant may fund up to 85% of the total cost of the project.

3.2.3 POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP GRANT

The purpose of the Postdoctoral fellowship grant is to help young researchers (up to seven years after doctoral award) to develop their academic careers. 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 Postdoctoral fellowships is ISK 21 million for a 36-month project, ISK 14 million for a 24-month project, and ISK 7 million for a 12-month project. The Postdoctoral fellowship grant may fund up to 100% of the total project cost. The applicant must explain how the fellowship fits with previous work of applicant, how it will enhance his/her career development, and provide information about future research plans after the grant period. If grant recipient accepts another position during the grant period, the grant payments will be terminated at the start date of the new position.

3.2.4 DOCTORAL STUDENT GRANTS

Doctoral students can apply for grants covering their 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. Please note that salaries for doctoral students can also be applied for in Project grant proposals and Grant of Excellence proposals. If salaries are funded through more than one grant mechanism simultaneously, the same student cannot receive funding for more than 12 man-months per year. The 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.

3.3 ELIGIBLE COST

3.3.1 SALARIES

Grants can be used to fund salaries of researchers, graduate students and technical staff. Participating researchers may be unidentified at time of proposal, but work assignments for all persons involved in the project must be detailed in the budget. For maximum salary amounts, including related expenses per month and the total number of months per person approved by the IRF, see Table 2. IRF salaries are expected to increase by 3% annually. IRF awards may not be used to augment the total salary of those who are simultaneously receiving a full-time salary for other work (including pension).

Table 2. Maximum salaries, including related expenses per month and the total number of months per person, approved by the IRF as project cost for the grant year 2017.

Position	Salaries per month (ISK)	Number of months per person
Senior personnel 1 (e.g. full professor)	755.000	Up to 36 months
Senior personnel 2 (e.g. associate professor)	720.000	Up to 36 months
Senior personnel 3 (e.g. assistant professor)	625.000	Up to 36 months
Postdoctoral researcher	495.000	Up to 36 months
Researcher	380.000	Up to 36 months
Doctoral student	380.000	Up to 36 months
Masters student	340.000	Up to 12 months

3.3.2 OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

This item consists of the total sum of all the necessary supplies for the project, with the exception of costs associated with contracted services, overhead, and facilities. Operational expenses, and their relation to the proposed activities, must be justified in detail on the electronic proposal form, and when appropriate, with price quotes attached. Note that all unexplained cost will be rejected.

Equipment for up to ISK 2 million can be included in the proposal for the total project period. Proposals for costly instruments and equipment shall be submitted to the Infrastructure fund, and not to funds described in this Handbook. Please note that the minimum amount for an application to the Infrastructure fund is ISK 2 million.

3.3.3 TRAVEL EXPENSES

This item consists of the total sum of travel and per diem expenses necessary for the progress of the

project. All travel expenses must be justified and their relation to the project goal(s) clearly explained.

3.3.4 CONTRACTED SERVICES

This item consists of work not carried out by the participants in the project, which is necessary for the project's progress. Publication cost for up to ISK 500,000 can be applied for during the project period under this item. Contracted services and their relation to the proposed activities must be justified in detail on the electronic proposal form and price quotes must be attached when appropriate. No overhead expenses can be claimed for contracted services.

3.3.5 OVERHEAD 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 and equipment cost. 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.

3.4 WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE APPLICATION

Appendices A and B must be submitted without exception, and appendices C-G must be submitted where appropriate. A template for appendix A is available in the Rannís electronic proposal system.

The review of the proposal will solely be based on the application and relevant accompanying appendices. Proposals not using the template for appendix A will be rejected. Incomplete proposals can be rejected at any time in the review process. No documents are accepted after the closing of the application deadline.

All proposals must be submitted through the Rannís electronic proposal system.

Appendix A. Project description

A template for appendix A is available on the Rannís website. The form is divided into predefined sections, which should not be altered. When all

information has been entered, applicants are asked to separate appendix A into two documents: 1) *Project description*, and 2) *Bibliography*, and then upload the two documents separately as pdf files. In the electronic proposal system, the number of pages in the *Project description* section is automatically counted, but not in the *Bibliography* section. The page limit (Times/Times New Roman 12 pt. font with 1.5 line spacing and 2.5 cm page margins) for the *Project description* section of the application (including title page and guidelines) is 22 pages for Grant of Excellence applications; 17 pages for Project grant applications; 14 pages for Postdoctoral fellowship grant applications; and 7 pages for Doctoral student grant applications. **To ensure equal treatment of applications, the IRF reserves the right to reject all applications that are not completed using the most current version of the template for Appendix A.**

The Project description 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. Any consents and/or permits that need to be sought for conducting the research should be detailed here
- d) Management and co-operation (domestic/foreign)
- e) Proposed publication of results and data storage (including open access policy)
- f) Contribution of doctoral and master's degree students to the project
- g) Career development plan (for Postdoctoral fellowship applications)

The applicants make the obvious demand that those reviewing the proposal are experts in the field of science under which the proposal falls. In return, one of the prime premises for a high-quality review is that the project has been described in such detail that the review can be made on the basis of the information provided in the proposal. A high-quality project description will facilitate the professional

review of the proposal. 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. The main milestones for each year in the project shall be described if funding is sought for more than 1 year.
- 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. The role of each party should also be clearly defined. International collaboration, if any, should be detailed separately.
- Information on which parts of the project are executed by doctoral or master's students should be included, as well as information on 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, confirmed scientific theories, etc.

- Furthermore, it should be explained in the application how the results would be promoted, as well as their publications in professional journals, reports, conferences, etc., and whether, and then how, the proprietary rights to the results would be protected.
- Possible ethical considerations in carrying out the project should be addressed.

Appendix 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 information on citation index (h-index or comparable). Any gaps in research activity due to sickness, parental leave or other reasons should be noted.

Appendix C. Letter of intent

A signed letter of intent by "other participants" confirming their participation and explaining their role in the project. 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.

Appendix D. Declaration from host institute (required for Postdoctoral fellowship applications)

A letter of declaration from host institute confirming invitation to the applicant and stating that the available facilities are appropriate.

Appendix E. Doctoral degree certificate (required for Postdoctoral fellowship applications).

Appendix F. Doctoral student admission statement (required for Doctoral student grant applications) A letter from the Student Registration office (or comparable office) of the appropriate institution confirming the admission of the doctoral student to the doctoral programme.

Appendix G. Price quote

If equipment costs are applied for, price quotes from the manufacturer/vendor must accompany the proposal.

3.5 EXPERT PANELS IN THE CALL 2017

In the call for grant year 2017, there are seven expert panels in different fields of sciences (see Table 3). Each panel consists of up to seven active researchers selected for their expertise in their respective fields. Applicants select in which expert panel their proposal is to be reviewed.

Table 3. Expert panels in the annual open call 2017.

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, behavioural 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 Biological sciences (cell biology, 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

For further information regarding appointment of expert panel members and the role and responsibility of the expert panels, please see section 4, *The review process*.

Specific questions regarding individual expert panels and disciplines are handled by Rannís staff. Applicants should under no circumstances contact expert panel members with matters regarding proposals during or after the review process.

4 THE REVIEW PROCESS

4.1 APPOINTMENT OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

Expert panel members are appointed by the Science Committee of the Icelandic Science and Technology Policy Council. Each panel shall have as equal a gender distribution as possible, have members with expertise that represent the breadth of disciplines in the panel and at least two members of each panel should be professionally active outside of Iceland. The requirement for serving as a panel member is, at a minimum, a qualification equivalent to associate professor/docent. When appointed, the panels are made public on the Rannís website.

The Science Committee appoints one person from each of the panels to serve as chair for that panel. The chair is responsible for assessment of proposals being made in an ethical fashion and in accordance with the IRF mandate. The chair is also responsible for coordinating the work of the expert panel with the help of the programme officer.

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

Pluridisciplinary proposals interweave subject matters, theories, and/or research methods from more than one discipline. When submitting a pluridisciplinary proposal, applicants are asked to indicate all relevant expert panels, identifying one as a preferred “home” panel. These selections will inform the selection of external reviewers. In order for an application to be considered pluridisciplinary, it must include applicants with expertise in all identified disciplines.

4.3 PROCESSING OF APPLICATIONS

When an application has been successfully submitted to Rannís through the electronic submission system, it is processed as follows (Figure 2):

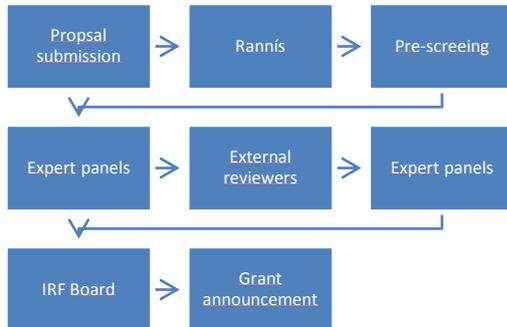


Figure 2. Processing of applications from submission to grant announcement.

4.3.1 INITIAL SCREENING

All proposals are screened by the Rannís staff to ensure compliance with the rules of the IRF. Proposals that do not pass the initial screening are rejected without a review, and the applicant is notified of that outcome.

4.3.2 ASSESSMENTS OF PROPOSALS

Each proposal is reviewed by two to three external experts, and the respective expert panel. All proposals within each expert panel are ranked based on the overall quality of the proposal (see Chapter 5, below).

4.3.3 FUNDING DECISION

When the expert panels have finalized their 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 introduces the proposals. The expert panel chair covers in detail all applications that received an 'A' rating (see below). The final decision on funding is taken by the IRF Board following presentations by all expert panel chairs. The Board can solicit information and other input beyond the expert panels if necessary. 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 the IRF Board has decided on funding, all applicants will receive a formal reply and a copy of both the expert panel review and the external reviews.

Under Art. 4 of Act No. 3/2003, the funding decisions of the IRF Board are not subject to administrative complaints.

4.3.4 GRANTS AWARDED

Grants awarded are published on the Rannís website and can be searched [online](#)⁶.

4.4 DISTRIBUTION OF ANNUAL PAYMENTS OF GRANTED PROJECTS

- First payment (40%) upon signing the grant agreement.
- Second payment (40%) to be paid on June 1.
- Final payment (20%) upon approval of the annual/final report.

4.4.1 REPORTING OF GRANTED PROJECTS

The principal investigator is responsible for submitting an annual report by January 10th following each grant year, and a final report within one year of the conclusion of the project. The reports are reviewed by Rannís staff who makes recommendations on continued support to the IRF Board. The Rannís staff member designated to a given grant has the authority to request further information from grantees upon review of the report 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. Forms for annual and final reports can be found on the [Rannís website](#).

Annual reports

In the annual report, costs and finances based on the previous year's budget and a cost estimate for

⁶ In Icelandic

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.

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 budget overview on total costs and finances shall accompany the final report. Any differences between planned budget and actual cost of the project must be explained in the final report.

5 EXPERT PANEL GUIDELINES

The role of the Expert Panel is to review proposals to the IRF based on the scientific value of the project, the applicants' qualifications to carry out the project, appropriateness of the research facilities, and the likelihood of the project resulting in the proposed impact. The expert panels establish a ranking list based on the expert evaluations, and finalise each proposal review with a written report.

5.1 THE REVIEW PROCESS

Expert panel members receive a list of applications, along with abstract and associated personnel. Members then indicate which applications they are able to review, and which applications they cannot review due to conflict of interest. Each proposal 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 experts outside of Iceland (*two* experts for project grant proposals and postdoctoral fellowship proposals; and *three* experts for grant of excellence). Selections of external reviewers are based on area of expertise and scientific merits according to professional websites and citation databases. The primary reader has to make sure

that there is no conflict of interest between reviewers and applicants. Applicants are allowed to identify non-preferred reviewers. In such cases, applicants are asked to specify the reasons for their request. Experts whom applicants have identified in their proposal as "Non-preferred reviewers" will not be contacted.

When an external expert has agreed on reviewing a proposal the Expert panel member notifies Rannís, which then provides the external expert with an access to the Rannís on-line review system. The external review involves an in-depth reading of proposals. It should be noted that in accordance with the [Icelandic Information Act](#)⁷ (no. 140/2012), Rannís cannot keep the names of external reviewers confidential. Rannís only informs applicants of the identity of reviewers upon request. When external reviewers have submitted their evaluation and readers on the Expert panel have drafted their reviews, the Expert panel meets at Rannís to discuss all proposals and deliberate on ranking. The evaluation report on the Rannís on-line review system and grade the proposal. The Expert panel meetings have on their agenda to review applications in light of external reviews and draft reviews by panel readers. Applications are then ranked in terms of quality. After the meeting, the first reader completes the Expert panel review and the Expert panel chair submits the review to the IRF Board. When the IRF Board has decided on the grant awards, the applicants receive the Expert panel evaluation and the external reviews.

5.2 ONLINE EVALUATION SYSTEM

Each panel member gets access to IRF's online evaluation system where all proposals to the panel and relevant documents can be viewed. Expert panel members do not get access to grant applications where they have conflict of interest.

The web-based expert panel review sheet is divided into three parts:

PART 1 – Proposal Overview

Part 1 contains an overview of the proposal, including project description and accompanying files relevant to the review process. Reviews from

⁷ In Icelandic

assigned external reviewers are also available in pdf form.

PART 2 – Review

Part 2 contains three text fields and a ranking sheet. The review can only be edited by the primary reader and the chair of the expert panel, but can be viewed by all expert panel members. Proposals are assigned a grade based on the overall quality of the proposals (see Table 4).

PART 3 – Submit

In Part 3, an overview is generated automatically from input in Part 2. The Expert panel chair submits the evaluation after the panel meeting and after panel members have had an opportunity to edit the review text in accordance with panel discussions.

Table 4. Grades awarded by Expert panels.

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

5.3 EXPERT PANEL MEETINGS

Before the meeting

The first reader drafts a summary evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals he/she is responsible for, based on the submitted external reviews.

At the meeting

During the expert panel meetings, the primary readers present their respective proposals, briefly introduce the background of the external reviewers, present the external reviewers' reports, and finally offer their own assessment of the respective proposals. The two second readers then provide their comments and the panel discusses the review. Panel members with a conflict of interest are requested to leave the room while the relevant proposals are being discussed. This is documented in the meeting minutes by the programme officer.

After discussing all proposals, each Expert panel establishes a ranking list of proposals based on the final grades given by the panel. A separate ranking list for each grant type is prepared. Proposals are ranked into three categories: A (A1-A4), B and C. Grade A1 should be reserved for top proposals only. Generally, no more than 5% of proposals should be given the grade A1, and no more than 10% should receive a grade of A2. There are no restrictions on grades A3, A4, B and C. This meeting concludes by finalizing expert panel reviews.

After the meeting

The chair of the expert panel is responsible for submitting the written reports to the IRF database.

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.

6 EXTERNAL REVIEWERS' GUIDELINES

6.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

Project grant proposals, Doctoral student grant proposals, and postdoctoral fellowship proposals are generally reviewed by two external experts, whereas Grant of excellence are evaluated by three external experts. Within each expert panel, proposals are ranked based on external evaluations and discussions within the panel. The ranking list is presented to the IRF Board to make a final decision on awards.

All reviewers engaged in reviewing applications for IRF are required to read Section 1: *General*

information about the Icelandic Research Fund, and Section 4: The review process in this handbook.

No fee is paid for external evaluations of proposals to the IRF.

6.1.1 REVIEWERS' ANONYMITY

In accordance with Icelandic law, Rannís cannot keep the names of external reviewers confidential. Rannís only informs applicants of the identity of reviewers upon request.

6.1.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

External reviewers are asked to identify any conflict of interest. Conflict of interest disqualifies reviewers.

6.2 EXTERNAL REVIEW - INSTRUCTIONS

The External Peer Review sheet is divided into four parts:

PART 1 – Proposal

This part contains the proposal 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 to provide clear and constructive criticism in the review. When evaluating the proposal, the following is to be considered:

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 and other communication to the general public and stakeholders.

Scientific quality and feasibility

- Scientific quality of the project.
- Is the project described in adequate detail, in terms of, for example, research question and methods? Are project aims clearly specified?
- Feasibility and importance of proposed project. Project plan, work packages, milestones and deliverables.

Principal investigator (supervisor in the case of Doctoral student grant), other participants, and project management

- Relevant knowledge, experience and qualifications of the principal investigator and other participants in the field of the proposed project.
- Experience with national and international collaboration.
- Research environment, infrastructure and resources.
- Management structure and coordination of project.
- Role of graduate students (not applicable to Doctoral student grants).

Impact on carrier development (when evaluating Postdoctoral fellowship proposals)

- Project relevance to career plans of applicant.
- Future cooperation with host institution.

PART 3 – Summary

In this section, the proposal's overall strengths and weaknesses are summarized.

PART 4 – Submit

In this section, external reviewers can access a printable overview of the review for confirmation. Upon confirmation, the review is submitted to the Rannís database and becomes accessible to Expert panel members.