

## Guidelines for referee panels assessing Researcher Projects 2021

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### Overview

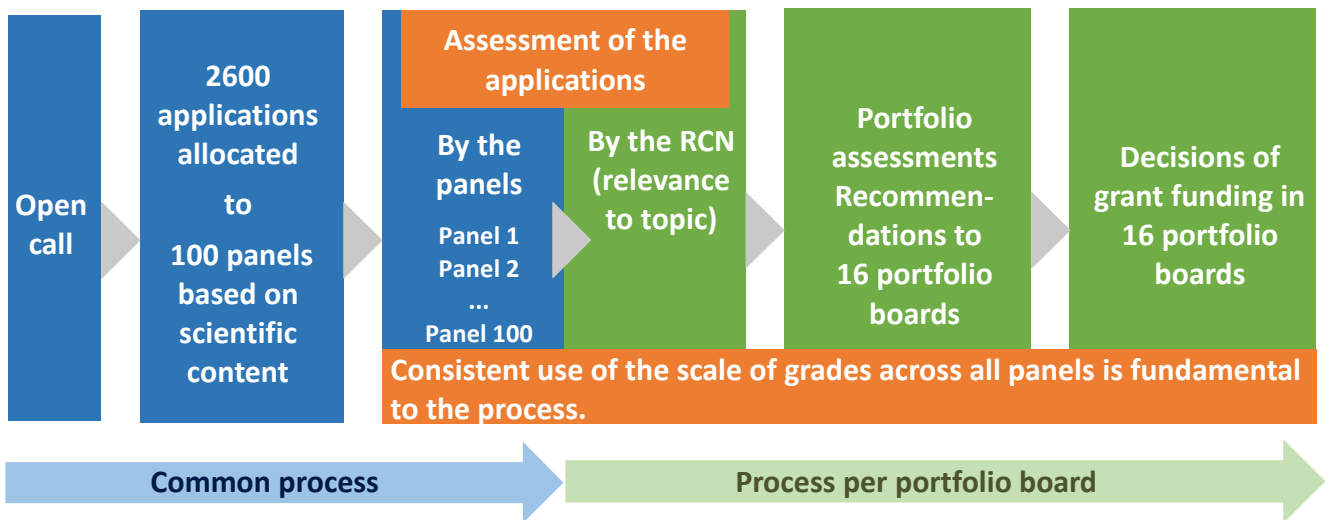
The Research Council of Norway has issued four calls for proposals for Researcher Project with submission deadline 10 February 2021:

- Researcher Project for Scientific Renewal
- Researcher Project for Young Talents
- Three-year Researcher Project with International Mobility
- Large-scale Interdisciplinary Researcher Project

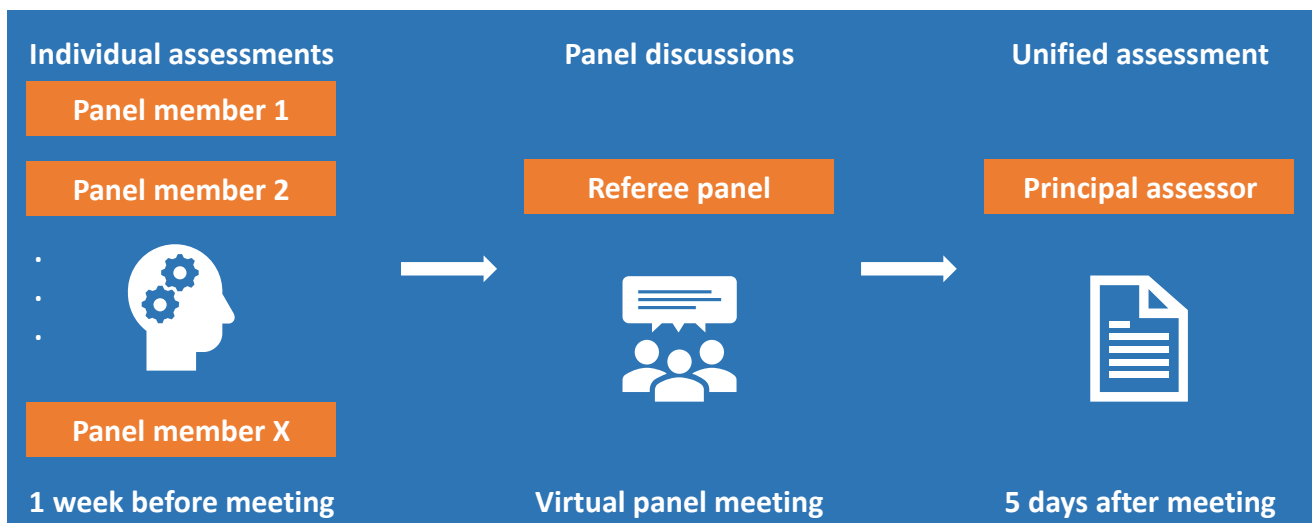
The calls were open to proposals from all disciplines and thematic areas, for both basic and applied research. The calls contained one or more *topics*, each with specific priorities.

The assessment of the submitted applications will proceed in three main steps: First, the applications will be assessed by a common set of referee panels. Secondly, the applications will be assessed by the Research Council administration, in relation to the individual topics and their specific priorities. Thirdly, the Research Council portfolio boards will make the final funding decisions.

It is essential that the scale of grades is used according to its definition (see section C). Consistent use of the scale of grades across all panels is fundamental to the process.



**Figure 1: Overview of the assessment process.**



**Figure 2: Overview of the referee panel assessment process.** Panel members submit individual assessments of all applications prior to meeting, discuss the proposals in a joint virtual meeting, and submit a unified panel assessment afterwards.

## A. The referee panel assessment process

All panel members are required to read and participate in the assessment of all applications.

Each application will be assigned a principal and a second assessor. Please note that you may be asked to serve as principal or second assessor for proposals in fields outside your own primary areas of expertise. If the necessary expertise is not available within the panel, the Research Council administration will recruit additional external expertise to support the panel's work.

The panels should base their assessment on the application form, the 11-page project description (15 pages for Large-scale Interdisciplinary Researcher Projects), and the CVs of the project manager and key project participants. Please note that the applicants are not asked to submit letters of support, except for Three-year Researcher Project with International Mobility.

### 1. Individual assessment of applications prior to panel meeting

Prior to the panel meeting, we ask you to prepare and submit individual assessments of each proposal as follows:

- **The principal assessor** must submit an assessment, grading all criteria and giving thorough written comments to each grade (between 5 and 10 sentences for each criterion, including the Overall assessment).
- **The second assessor** is to submit an assessment, grading all criteria and giving *short* written comments to each grade (between 2 and 3 sentences for each criterion, including the Overall assessment).
- **The other panel members** are to submit a *limited* individual assessment, i.e. grading all criteria, but are *not* required to give any written comments.

**The individual assessments should be submitted no later than 1 week prior to the panel meeting.**

### 2. Panel meeting discussion

The individual assessments of the applications will be made available to the rest of the panel as soon as all assessors have submitted their assessments.

We ask all panel members to read the individual assessments of all applications beforehand, to obtain a good starting point for discussion.

During the meeting, the panel must discuss each application and, based on the discussions and the individual assessments submitted, agree on a unified assessment.

For each application, the *principal assessor* will start the discussion by giving a brief review of the proposal and his/her assessment. The *second assessor* and the other panel members will then provide their comments. The members of the panel should strive to reach consensus.

It is essential that the scale of grades is used according to its definition (see section C).

#### *Ranking of the best applications*

Applications given an overall grade of 6 or 7 by the panel are to be ranked. Applications submitted to the four calls for proposals should be ranked separately.

If two projects are deemed of similar quality (according to the three criteria and Overall assessment) and the project managers are of different gender, the two projects may be given the same ranking order. The Research Council administration will use this information when making recommendations for funding, as part of our work to promote gender balance in research.

### 3. Completing and submitting the final assessments

The principal assessor is responsible for updating the electronic assessment form to reflect the panel's unified assessment of the application.

The final assessment should consist of a grade and written comments (5 to 10 sentences) for each criterion, including the Overall assessment. The text should be short and concise.

The written comments should justify the grades given and there must be consistency between the comments and the grades.

The final assessment forms should be completed and submitted during the meeting. If they are not, the principal assessor must submit the remaining assessments within five days.

The Research Council administration will ensure that the written comments to be sent to the applicant are phrased in an appropriate fashion and will consult the principal assessor if any further adjustments are needed.

#### Overview panel deliverables:

Deliverables from each panel member *prior* to the meeting:

1. An individual assessment of and/or grades for each application, in line with your role as principal or second assessor or other panel member

Deliverables from the referee panel *during and after* the meeting:

1. A unified assessment of and grades for each application
2. A ranked list, for each call for proposals, of applications with an overall grade of 6 or 7

## B. The objectives and purposes of the calls for proposals

This panel will assess XX applications in total:

- Researcher Project for Scientific Renewal: XX applications
- Researcher Project for Young Talents: XX applications
- Three-year Researcher Project with International Mobility: XX applications
- Large-scale Interdisciplinary Researcher Project: XX applications

**The overall objective of the Researcher Projects** is to promote renewal and development in research across all disciplines and thematic areas.

In addition, the calls have specific purposes, which should be considered when grading (see page 8):

**Researcher Project for Scientific Renewal** is intended to support scientific renewal and development in research that can help advance the international research front. It is intended for researchers who have demonstrated the ability to conduct research of high scientific quality.

**Researcher Project for Young Talents** is targeted towards young researchers in the early stages of their careers who have demonstrated the potential to conduct research of high scientific quality. The intention is to give talented young researchers the opportunity to pursue their own research ideas and lead a research project.

**Three-year Researcher Project with International Mobility** is targeted towards researchers at the post-doctoral level. The researcher spends two years at a research organisation abroad and the third year at a research organisation in Norway. The projects aim to increase international mobility, promote career development, and transfer knowledge to research groups in Norway.

**Large-scale Interdisciplinary Researcher Project** is intended to advance the research front by providing larger-scale allocations to interdisciplinary projects. Researchers from different subject areas will work together to generate new knowledge that would not be possible to obtain without interdisciplinary cooperation. It is intended for researchers who have demonstrated the ability to conduct research of high scientific quality.

## C. The assessment criteria and scale of grades

We ask you to assess the projects with respect to the three criteria *Excellence*, *Impact* and *Implementation*, and give an *Overall assessment of the referee/panel*, as detailed below. Applicants are instructed on how to structure their proposal in line with the assessment criteria, in the template for the project description.

### 1. Excellence

#### 1.1 The extent to which the proposed work is ambitious, novel, and goes beyond the state-of-the-art

- Scientific creativity and originality.
- Novelty and boldness of hypotheses or research questions.
- Potential for development of new knowledge beyond the current state-of-the-art, including significant theoretical, methodological, experimental or empirical advancement.

#### 1.2 The quality of the proposed R&D activities

- Quality of the research questions, hypotheses and project objectives, and the extent to which they are clearly and adequately specified.
- Credibility and appropriateness of the theoretical approach, research design and use of scientific methods. Appropriate consideration of interdisciplinary approaches.
- The extent to which appropriate consideration has been given to ethical issues, safety issues, gender dimension in research content, and use of stakeholder/user knowledge if appropriate.

#### **Excellence – please note**

*Regarding "safety issues": Where relevant, we ask you to consider if the applicant has described in a satisfactory manner how potentially undesirable effects from carrying out the project, on human and animal health, climate and the environment and society at large, can be avoided.*

*Regarding "ethical issues": The assessment of a proposal is not an ethical approval of the research project. If relevant, the applicant should briefly have described how ethical issues*

*will be dealt with, to assure the panel that there is an appropriate plan for management of ethical issues.*

## **2. Impact**

### **2.1 Potential impact of the proposed research**

- Potential for academic impact:

The extent to which the planned outputs of the project address important present and/or future scientific challenges.

- Potential for societal impact (if addressed by the applicant):

The extent to which the planned outputs of the project address UN Sustainable Development Goals or other important present and/or future societal challenges.

- The extent to which the potential impacts are clearly formulated and plausible.

### **2.2 Communication and exploitation**

- Quality and scope of communication and engagement activities with different target audiences, including relevant stakeholders/users.

*For Three-year Researcher Project with International Mobility you should in addition to 2.1 and 2.2 assess impact based on 2.3 detailed below.*

### **2.3 Potential for enhancement of the career prospects of the researcher**

- The extent to which the project, including the choice of the host institution abroad, will enhance the potential and future career prospects of the researcher.
- Quality and appropriateness of the training and supervision of the researcher, and of the integration in the host institutions.
- Potential for transfer of knowledge from the host institution abroad to the Norwegian host institution during the third year of the project.

### **Impact – please note**

*All Researcher Projects are to generate new insights at the frontiers of knowledge, with or without ambitions of societal impact. This means that for all proposals, we ask you to assess the potential academic impact, i.e. "the extent to which the planned outputs of the project address important present and/or future scientific challenges."*

*In addition, if the applicant states in the Impact chapter of the project description that the project is relevant for specific societal challenges or the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), we ask you to consider to what extent the knowledge and outputs generated in the project can contribute to solving challenges and/or shed light on important issues related to the societal challenges/SDG(s) in question. Note that it is optional for the applicants to address the potential for societal impact and this should only be assessed if the applicant has chosen to include this as potential impact in the application.*

*The description of the potential impact should be project specific and related to the planned research, and not general elaborations on the benefits of research in a wider context.*

*Applicants are instructed to describe communication and engagement activities in the Impact chapter of the project description, and to leave the Dissemination plan section in the application form blank. However, if a Dissemination plan has been included in the application form, we ask you to consider this information as well.*

## **3. Implementation**

### **3.1 The quality of the project manager and project group**

- The extent to which the project manager has relevant expertise and experience, and demonstrated ability to perform high-quality research (as appropriate to the career stage).
- The degree of complementarity of the participants and the extent to which the project group has the necessary expertise needed to undertake the research effectively.

### **3.2 The quality of the project organisation and management**

- Effectiveness of the project organisation, including the extent to which resources assigned to work packages are aligned with project objectives and deliverables.
- Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks, ensuring that all participants have a valid role and adequate resources in the project to fulfil that role.
- Appropriateness of the proposed management structures and governance.

### **Implementation - please note**

*Regarding assessment of the project manager: The Research Council of Norway is a signatory to the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#). Therefore, we kindly ask you to bear in mind the following when assessing applicants' CVs:*

- *Do not use journal impact factor to evaluate the quality of the applicants' previous work.*
- *Be sensitive to legitimate delays in research publication and personal factors that may have affected the applicant's record of outputs.*

*Regarding assessment of the project group: Please note that you are not to assess the qualifications of candidates for doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships. The applicants have been instructed not to specify candidates for such positions in the application or submit their CVs.*

## **Overall assessment of the referee/panel**

Overall assessment of the referee/panel based on the criteria *Excellence, Impact* and *Implementation*.

### **Overall assessment - please note**

*The overall assessment should be based on a discretionary, general review in which each assessment criterion is weighted approximately equally. In addition, you should take the specific purpose of the call into consideration (see section B) when deciding the grade for overall assessment.*



## Scale of grades

After they have been assessed by one of over 100 different referee panels, the applications will be handled in a joint process (see figure 1). It is therefore essential that all panels use the scale of grades and assessment criteria according to their definition below.

### Scale of grades for Excellence, Impact, Implementation

Grade	Defining characteristics
7	<b>Exceptional</b> The proposal addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion exceptionally well. Shortcomings are not present, or only very minor.
6	<b>Excellent</b> The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Only minor shortcomings are present.
5	<b>Very good</b> The proposal addresses the criterion very well. A small number of shortcomings are present.
4	<b>Good</b> The proposal addresses the criterion well. A number of shortcomings are present.
3	<b>Fair</b> The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are a number of significant weaknesses.
2	<b>Weak</b> The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
1	<b>Poor</b> The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

### Scale of grades for the Overall assessment

Grade	Defining characteristics
7	<b>Exceptional</b> The proposal is of exceptional quality, and of the very highest international standard. All relevant aspects of the criteria are exceptionally well addressed. Shortcomings are not present, or only very minor.
6	<b>Excellent</b> The proposal is of excellent quality, and of a very high international standard. All relevant aspects of the criteria are successfully addressed. Only minor shortcomings are present.
5	<b>Very good</b> The proposal is very good. The criteria are very well addressed. A small number of shortcomings are present.
4	<b>Good</b> A good proposal. The criteria are well addressed. A number of shortcomings are present.
3	<b>Fair</b> A proposal of fair quality. The criteria are broadly addressed. Significant weaknesses are present.
2	<b>Weak</b> The proposal is weak. The criteria are inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

1	<b>Poor</b> The proposal is of poor quality. It fails to address the criteria or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
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## D. General guidelines for writing the assessments

All reviewers are kindly asked to follow these general guidelines:

- Make sure that your grades are in line with your comments.
- Use dispassionate, analytical and unambiguous language.
- Use grammatically correct, complete, clear sentences with no jargon.
- Do your best to formulate critical comments as constructive feedback that the applicant can use to improve their application.
- Avoid using "I" or "my" etc. in assessments of applications discussed by the panel. The final assessment must be worded in a way that makes it clear that the panel jointly has agreed on the text.
- Avoid self-declaration of insufficient expertise (personal or panel) or non-confidence in the proposal.
- Avoid reference to the applicant's age, nationality, gender, or personal matters.
- Avoid any direct comparison with other contemporary proposals.
- Avoid any reference or comparison with assessment of previous proposals.
- Avoid comments that merely give a description or a summary of the proposal.
- Avoid dismissive statements about the project manager, the proposed science, or the scientific field concerned.