

Annex 1 to
Directive no. 1.1-4/15/40 of the Management
Board of the Estonian Research Council of 25
March 2015

Conditions of and Procedure for Application for Exploratory and Start-Up Research Grant

Chapter 1

GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. Scope of Application

The directive establishes the conditions of and procedure for applying for, evaluating, granting and reporting on personal research funding.

2. Personal Research Funding

2.1. Personal research funding (hereinafter *grant*) means the funding of high-level research and development activities carried out by researchers or small research groups who are employed by a research and development institution and comprises three categories of grants:

2.1.1. a grant to support an individual high-risk or innovative research project (hereinafter *exploratory research grant*) at a high international level;

2.1.2. a grant to support young researchers who wish to promote their independent research career and to establish an independent research group (hereinafter *start-up research grant*);

2.1.3. a grant to support postdoctoral research (see Annex 3 to Directive no. 1-1.4/15/40 of the Board of the Estonian Research Council of 25 March 2015).

2.2. A grant shall be awarded for the implementation of an independent research project and the purpose of the project is not the co-funding of other grants awarded under the Organisation of Research and Development Act.

3. Research Project

A research project is a description of a study with a clearly defined research problem and fundamental or applied research planned to address the problem.

4. Applicant

4.1. A researcher can apply for funding upon receiving consent from an Estonian research and development institution (hereinafter *host institution*). The consent must include confirmation that the host institution shall enter into an employment contract with the applicant if such a contractual relationship does not already exist at the time of submitting the application.

4.2. A Principal Investigator whose application in two consecutive calls has failed to reach the thresholds set in Section 12.3. may not submit an application for the next call.

4.3. The applicant must be the Principal Investigator of the project for which the grant is applied.

5. Reviewing Entity

The review of applications for grants (hereinafter *application*) is organised by the Estonian Research

Council (hereinafter *Council*).

6. Grant Award Contract

6.1. The Council shall enter into a tripartite one-year grant award contract (hereinafter *grant award contract*) with the host institution and the Principal Investigator specified in Section 4.1.. The grant award contract sets out the mutual rights, duties and liability of the parties. In the event of a multi-annual research project, a new grant award contract is concluded annually.

6.2. A grant is awarded to the host institution that is required to allow the principal investigator to use the direct costs portion of the awarded grant for the implementation of the project in compliance with the application.

6.3. If a grant is awarded to a research project, the host institution shall enter into an employment contract with the Principal Investigator and the implementers specified in Section 9.1.1. for implementing the research project if such a contractual relationship does not already exist at the time of awarding a grant.

6.4. If the employment contract between the Principal Investigator and the host institution expires during the grant term and the parties do not enter into a new employment contract:

6.4.1. the Council will unilaterally terminate the grant award contract and

6.4.2. shall enter into a new grant award contract with the Principal Investigator and the research and development institution with which the Principal Investigator has signed a new employment contract and that consents to enter into the grant award contract. Before entering into the grant award contract, the Council shall assess whether the new host institution has the necessary research environment and infrastructure required for the implementation of the research project. In the event of a negative assessment, no grant award contract shall be entered into with the host institution.

6.5. A principal investigator who has taken up employment abroad may apply for the conclusion of a grant award contract with a foreign host institution based on principles of Science Europe's Letter of Intent "Transfer of Grants – Money follows Researcher". A decision about entering or not entering into a grant award contract with a foreign host institution shall be made by the Board of the Council on a case by case principle.

6.6. After the termination of a grant award contract, the host institution with which the employment contract of the principal investigator has expired is required to refund the unused part of the grant to the Council.

6.7. In the event specified in Section 6.4.2., a new grant award contract is entered into not later than within three months as of the termination of the previous one. Until conclusion of a new grant award contract, the Council will suspend grant payments.

6.8. If a new grant award contract has not been entered into by the end of the term specified in Section 6.7., the Board of the Council will repeal the decision to approve the application.

Chapter 2

CONDITIONS OF APPLYING FOR GRANT

7. Applying for a Grant

7.1. A researcher draws up an application and the host institution submits it to the Council via the Estonian Research Information System (hereinafter *ETIS*).

7.1.1. An application can be submitted between April 1 through to 5:00 p.m. on 30 April in the year preceding the start year of a research project.

7.1.2. An application to continue awarding a grant can be submitted between September 1 through to 5:00

p.m. on 30 September.

7.2. The part of an application to be submitted to foreign experts must be in English.

7.3. The following must be set out in the English part of an application:

7.3.1. the Principal Investigator and other research staff;

7.3.2. the title of the research project;

7.3.3. a project summary;

7.3.4. the requested project period;

7.3.5. the general theoretical background of the planned research project and its link to previous research carried out by the Principal Investigator and other research staff;

7.3.6. the main objectives of the research project, hypotheses, methods, and the annual research plans;

7.3.7. information on considerations how ethical issues involved in the proposed research will be followed.

The applicants are required to consider the ethical risk of any procedure within a research project which involves human participation or personal data, including a description of how the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity of subjects will be followed, and a statement on how the data will be stored and protected. Use of research methods that require review or approval from a human ethics or a bioethics research committee, should be also clearly indicated in the application. If the corresponding approvals are available by the application deadline, they are attached to the application;

7.3.8. expected results, their potential applicability as well as possible future research directions;

7.3.9. a description of previous research and development activities during the last 10 years and the track record of the Principal Investigator;

7.3.10. information on Estonian and international joint projects in which the Principal Investigator has been involved during the last 10 years;

7.3.11. a description of the infrastructure and research environment at the host institution;

7.3.12. the budget of the research project.

7.4. The following must be set out in the Estonian part of an application:

7.4.1. the title of the research project;

7.4.2. a project summary.

7.5. The Council has the right to demand additional data and documents from the applicant and the host institution.

8. Principal Investigator

8.1. A Principal Investigator of an exploratory research grant is a person who:

8.1.1. has been awarded a doctorate in Estonia or who has foreign qualifications equal thereto;

8.1.2. is employed full-time at the host institution at the time of implementing a research project. By way of exception, a Principal Investigator who is employed at least half-time at a host institution can be considered compliant by the Evaluation Committee of the Council (hereinafter *Evaluation Committee*) if this does not jeopardise the successful implementation of the research project.

8.2. A Principal Investigator of a start-up research grant may be a researcher who:

8.2.1. has been awarded the first doctorate in Estonia or equivalent foreign qualifications at least 2 years before and no more than 7 years prior to the call closing date. The date of awarding the doctorate or equivalent foreign qualification is the date indicated in the respective document issued by the awarding institution. The Evaluation Committee may, where justified, consider eligible a person who has been awarded their first doctorate in Estonia or equivalent foreign qualification more than 7 years prior to the closing date of the call. In that case, the maximum effective time elapsed since the award of the first PhD can be extended in full month rounded up to the bigger amount of months, but only in certain properly

documented circumstances, e.g. parental leave or serving in the Defence Forces;

8.2.2. has completed postdoctoral studies (preferably outside of Estonia) after receiving their doctorate in Estonia or equivalent foreign qualification. The Evaluation Committee may, where justified, consider eligible a person who has not completed postdoctoral studies as the principal investigator of a start-up grant;

8.2.3. at the time of implementing the research project, is employed full-time at the host institution;

8.2.4. has not been the Principal Investigator of a start-up or exploratory research project or the Principal Investigator of a research topic of institutional research funding.

8.3. A Principal Investigator cannot act as any of the following during the grant term:

8.3.1. the Principal Investigator or research staff of another personal research funding project nor as a postdoctoral fellow;

8.3.2. the Principal Investigator or primary research staff of an institutional research funding topic;

8.3.3. the Principal Investigator or primary research staff of a research theme target-financed by a research and development institution.

8.4. By way of exception, a Principal Investigator can be the supervisor of a postdoctoral funding project during the grant term.

8.5. A Principal Investigator cannot be replaced during the grant term.

8.6. In case of suspension or termination of the grant award contract with the host institution, the rights and obligations of the Principal Investigator cannot be transferred to the other members of the research staff of the research project.

9. Participants of Research Project

9.1. In addition to the Principal Investigator, the following persons may participate in the implementation of a research project:

9.1.1. up to two members of the research staff who have been awarded a research degree in Estonia or who have equal foreign qualifications, and who are employed by a host institution at least half-time during implementation of the research project;

9.1.2. technical or auxiliary staff whose wages are covered in full or in part from the funds of the given research project;

9.1.3. master students or PhD students whose work is substantively related to the research project specified in the application and whose scholarships or wages are covered in full or in part from the funds of the research project.

9.2. A member of research staff cannot act as any of the following during the grant term:

9.2.1. the Principal Investigator or research staff of another personal research funding project nor as a postdoctoral fellow;

9.2.2. the Principal Investigator or primary research staff of an institutional research funding topic;

9.2.3. the Principal Investigator or primary research staff of a research theme target-financed by a research and development institution.

9.3. By way of exception, a member of research staff can be the supervisor of a postdoctoral funding project during the grant term.

10. Budget of Research Project

10.1. The budget of a research project contains expenses directly related to the implementation of a research project and overheads.

10.2. Direct costs are:

- 10.2.1. staff costs (wages along with any and all state taxes, contributions, benefits and compensation arising from law and the research scholarships of master students and PhD students);
 - 10.2.2. travel costs;
 - 10.2.3. acquisition costs of fixed assets directly related to the implementation of a research project (in accordance with the definition established by the host institution), to the extent of up to 10% of the direct expenses of the research project;
 - 10.2.4. subcontracting;
 - 10.2.5. costs relating to the publication and popularisation of results of research and development obtained by way of implementing a research project, and expenses relating to the protection of intellectual property;
 - 10.2.6. other direct costs required for research, based on the characteristics of the research project.
- 10.3. Overheads account for 20% of the amount of the direct costs (excl. subcontracting specified in Section 10.2.4.).
- 10.4. The Council retains the right to establish the maximum amounts or rates of cost categories.

11. Grant Term

The grant term is up to four years.

Chapter 3

EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS AND AWARD OF GRANTS

12. Evaluation of Grant Applications

- 12.1. The evaluation of applications is organised by the Council.
- 12.2. Applications are evaluated by the Evaluation Committee on the basis of Regulation No. 74 "Procedure for Formation and Rules of Procedure of Evaluation Committee of Estonian Research Council" of the Minister of Education and Research of 27 December 2011 and the evaluation guidelines approved by the Council.
- 12.3. The Council may set thresholds in evaluating the research project applications. No grant will be awarded if an application does not pass a threshold.
- 12.4. In order to evaluate applications, the Evaluation Committee forms research area-based expert panels.
- 12.5. Expert panels shall use the opinions and scores of at least two independent experts. At least one expert has to be from abroad.
- 12.6. Expert panels shall take into account the opinions and scores of experts when drawing up its opinion and scores but these are not binding for the panel.
- 12.7. Expert panels submit to the Evaluation Committee reasoned evaluations of the applications belonging to their area of expertise. The Evaluation Committee shall take into account the opinions and scores of the expert panels when drawing up its opinion and scores but these are not binding for the Evaluation Committee.
- 12.8. The Evaluation Committee shall assess applications and draw up the final evaluation of each application on the basis of the evaluations and scores of the expert panels and taking into account the following:
 - 12.8.1. justification of the research project and a description of the expected results, taking into account the

specifics of the research field and their applicability;

12.8.2. the qualifications and track record of the Principal Investigator (in the event of a start-up research grant, also whether the Principal Investigator has been a post-doctoral fellow);

12.8.3. the quality of the infrastructure and research environment available for carrying out the research project at the host institution;

12.8.4. justification for the proposed budget (including the share of subcontracting).

12.9. The Council retains the right to demand additional data and documents from an applicant regarding the data specified in Section 12.8..

12.10. Based on the final evaluations and scores, the Evaluation Committee shall draw up rankings of applications in each research field.

12.11. In the final assessment of an application, the Evaluation Committee may prescribe the conditions that the Principal Investigator and the host institution are required to fulfil upon receipt of the grant.

12.12. The Council makes the opinions stipulated in Section 12.5., the evaluations stipulated in Section 12.8., the initial proposal of the Evaluation Committee (hereinafter *proposal*) and the position of the applicant in the ranking stipulated in Section 12.10. available to the applicant and the host institution. The applicant and the host institution have the right to submit a joint written opinion on the proposal within the time limit established by the Council. If the Evaluation Committee has prescribed in the final evaluation of the application the conditions that must be fulfilled for receiving the grant, the applicant and the host institution will submit the consent and the action plan for fulfilment of the conditions.

13. Award of Grant

13.1. Taking into account the final evaluation, the joint opinion received from the applicant and the host institution, the consent and the action plan, the Evaluation Committee submits to the Board of the Council a reasoned and impartial proposal:

13.1.1. to award the grant to the requested amount;

13.1.2. to award the grant to a bigger-than-requested amount;

13.1.3. to award the grant to a smaller-than-requested amount;

13.1.4. not to award the grant.

13.2. Upon reasoning its decision, the Board of the Council has the right to submit a proposal to the Evaluation Committee for a repeat review.

13.3. A decision to approve or reject an application is made by a directive of the Board of the Council. In case of approval, the directive shall indicate the period to be financed and the annual grant amount.

Chapter 4

APPLYING FOR CONTINUANCE OF AWARD OF GRANT, REVISION OF GRANT AMOUNT, TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF THE GRANT AND TERMINATION OF THE GRANT

14. Applying for Continuance of Award of Grant and Evaluation of Follow-up Application

14.1. The continuance of the award of a grant is applied for annually until the end of the grant term in the manner and by the date specified in Section 7.1..

14.2. A follow-up application sets out data regarding substantial revisions of the research project, including revisions of the research staff provided for in Section 9.1.1. and the reasons for the sustainability of the research project.

14.3. A follow-up application is submitted in Estonian if not otherwise agreed between the Principal Investigator and the Council.

14.4. On the basis of a follow-up application, the documents annexed thereto, and the annual report and, if necessary, an interim report, the Evaluation Committee shall assess the following:

14.4.1. the implementation of the research project to date;

14.4.2. in the event of substantial revisions, the sustainability of implementation of the research project;

14.4.3. if the grant was awarded conditionally, the fulfilment of the conditions established upon awarding the grant pursuant to the action plan specified in Section 12.12..

14.5. Upon evaluation of the first follow-up application, the annual report of the research project is not evaluated.

15. Continuance of Award of Grant, Revision of Grant Amount and Termination of Award of Grant

15.1. On the basis of evaluation of a follow-up application and the data annexed thereto, the Evaluation Committee makes to the Board of the Council a reasoned proposal:

15.1.1. to continue awarding the grant in the former amount;

15.1.2. to continue awarding the grant in a bigger-than-requested amount;

15.1.3. to continue awarding the grant in a smaller-than-requested amount;

15.1.4. not to continue awarding the grant.

15.2. The proposal to continue awarding the grant in the former amount is made by the Evaluation Committee if the implementation of the research project is successful and no substantial changes in the sustainability of implementation of the research project or in the fulfilment of other conditions established by this procedure are identified.

15.3. A proposal to continue awarding the grant in a higher-than-expected amount may be made by the Evaluation Committee, stating the reasons for its decision, if:

15.3.1. in the year preceding the follow-up application, the amount of the grant has been reduced due to the circumstances set out in Sections 15.4. and 15.5. and the circumstances that caused the award of the smaller-than-requested grant have lapsed;

15.3.2. other substantial and reasoned circumstances exist.

15.4. A proposal to continue awarding the grant in a smaller-than-expected amount may be made by the Evaluation Committee, stating the reasons for its decision, if:

15.4.1. the progress of implementation of the research project was insufficient;

15.4.2. a violation of other conditions established by this procedure becomes evident;

15.4.3. other substantial and reasoned circumstances exist.

15.5. The Evaluation Committee makes a proposal to continue to award the grant in a smaller-than-requested amount if the need arises from the annual allocation from the state budget.

15.6. In the final evaluation of a follow-up application, the Evaluation Committee may describe the conditions that the principal investigator and the host institution are required to fulfil upon receipt of the grant. If the Evaluation Committee has described in the final evaluation of a follow-up application of a research project the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to continue receiving the grant, the principal investigator and the host institution submit the consent and the action plan for the purpose of fulfilment of the conditions.

15.7. The Evaluation Committee may make a proposal to discontinue awarding the grant if:

15.7.1. the action plan described in Section 15.6. has not been fulfilled;

15.7.2. the progress of implementation of the research project and the sustainability of implementation of

the research project have decreased considerably;

15.7.3. the Principal Investigator does not meet the requirements set in Section 8.3. during the implementation of the research project;

15.7.4. other substantial and reasoned circumstances exist.

15.8. A decision to approve or reject a follow-up application is made by a directive of the Board of the Council. In case of approval, the directive shall indicate the period to be financed and the annual grant amount.

15.9. The Council has the right to revoke a decision to approve an application and terminate the grant award contract if:

15.9.1. the host institution and the Principal Investigator have submitted a respective application;

15.9.2. the Evaluation Committee has made a respective proposal in accordance with Section 15.7.;

15.9.3. the host institution, the principal investigator or the research staff specified in Section 9.1.1. have fundamentally violated the requirements of the Organisation of Research and Development Act or this procedure;

15.9.4. the circumstance described in Section 6.8. exists;

15.9.5. the Principal Investigator is not able to or does not want to manage the research project (serious illness of the Principal Investigator or death, permanent residence in another country or other substantial and reasoned circumstances);

15.9.6. the positive review or approval from a human ethics or a bioethics research committee, stipulated in Section 7.3.7. has not been submitted by the start of human research or animal experimentations;

15.9.7. other substantial and reasoned circumstances exist.

15.10. After the revocation of a decision to approve an application and termination of a grant award contract, the host institution is required to refund the unused grant to the Council.

16. Temporary Suspension of the Grant

16.1. The grant can be temporarily suspended only upon receiving a reasoned application from the Principal Investigator and the host institution which has to be submitted to the Board of the Council. The Evaluation Committee shall make a reasoned proposal about the length of the suspension, its justification and appropriateness to the Board of the Council.

16.2. The Principal Investigator may apply for the temporary suspension of the grant only once during the grant period.

16.3. Temporary suspension of the grant may be applied for in case the existing employment contract of the Principal Investigator with the host institution is temporarily suspended due to parental leave, service in the Defence Forces, serious illness, or other reasoned circumstances.

16.4. In case of circumstances described in Section 16.3. the grant period may be temporarily suspended up to three years maximum whereas the initially allocated grant amount will not be changed due to the temporary suspension of the grant.

Chapter 5

REPORTING AND PUBLICATION OF RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

17. Submission of Annual Report

17.1. The Principal Investigator draws up an annual report on each calendar year of receipt of the grant,

indicating the following:

- 17.1.1. a summary of the research results of the research project in the reporting year;
- 17.1.2. the summarised working time equivalent to full time of the research staff financed by the grant;
- 17.1.3. the division of the direct expenses specified in Section 10.2., which are financed by the grant;
- 17.1.4. fulfilment of the conditions established upon awarding the grant.

17.2. The annual report is drawn up by the Principal Investigator in Estonian, if not agreed otherwise, and the host institution submits it to the Council via the ETIS not later than by January 31 of the year following the reporting year. No annual report needs to be submitted on the last year of the research project, but the respective data are submitted in the final report of the research project.

18. Submission of Interim Report

18.1. In case of justified circumstances, the Council has the right to demand the submission of an interim report of a research project.

18.2. The following is specified in an interim report of a research project:

- 18.2.1. the results corresponding to the purposes specified in the application;
- 18.2.2. the number and structure of the jobs used and necessary for the implementation of the research project;
- 18.2.3. other data requested by the Council;
- 18.2.4. other circumstances that are substantial on the estimate of the host institution or the Principal Investigator.

18.3. The interim report is drawn up by the Principal Investigator in Estonian, if not agreed otherwise, and the host institution submits it to the Council via the ETIS within two months of receipt of the request.

19. Evaluation of Interim Report

19.1. An interim report is evaluated if it is not reasonable to do it jointly with the evaluation of a follow-up application or in the last year of a research project.

19.2. An interim report is evaluated by the Evaluation Committee who makes a reasoned proposal to the Board of the Council:

- 19.2.1. pursuant to the regulations provided for in Section 15.2., to continue awarding the grant in the former amount;
- 19.2.2. pursuant to the regulations provided for in Section 15.4., to continue awarding the grant in the smaller-than-requested amount;
- 19.2.3. pursuant to the regulations provided for in Section 15.7., not to continue awarding the grant.
- 19.2.4. Upon reasoning its decision, the Board of the Council has the right to submit a proposal to the Evaluation Committee for a repeat review.

20. Submission of Final Report

20.1. The final report is drawn up by the Principal Investigator in Estonian, if not agreed otherwise, and submitted by the host institution to the Council via the ETIS not later than by March 31 of the year following the grant term.

20.2. The following is indicated in the final report of a research project:

- 20.2.1. the results (including the main results in Estonian in a popular essay format, publications and other intellectual property right objects) in accordance with the purposes specified in the application;
- 20.2.2. the number and structure of the jobs used and necessary for the implementation of the research project;
- 20.2.3. distribution of direct costs indicated in Section 10.2.;

20.2.4. fulfilment of conditions in case of conditional award of grant;
20.2.5. other circumstances that the Principal Investigator or the host institution deem relevant.

20.3 In case of a premature termination of the grant award, the Principal Investigator jointly with the host institution are obliged to submit the project final report as specified in Section 20.1..

20.4. In case the Principal Investigator is not able to draw the final report (serious illness of the Principal Investigator or death, commencing other work, moving to permanent residence in another country or other substantial and reasoned circumstances), the host institution shall draw the final report and submit it to the Council as specified in Section 20.1..

21. Evaluation of Final Report

On the basis of the final report, the Evaluation Committee evaluates the implementation of a research project and the Council makes the evaluation available to the Principal Investigator and the host institution via the ETIS, and shall make a summary thereof public.

22. Publication of Results of Research Project

22.1. Consolidated texts of publications drawn up as a result of the implementation of a research project are made freely available to the public via ETIS by the host institution, unless the conditions of publication, copyright or intellectual property protection state otherwise.

22.2. If a research publishing house temporarily restricts access to the public publications on the basis of Section 21.1., the consolidated texts of the publications drawn up as a result of the implementation of the research project will be made freely available via the ETIS by the host institution after the expiry of the restriction.

22.3. Upon publication of the results of implementation of a research project, it is indicated which funds were used for the implementation of the research project.

22.4. The final report of a research project (except its distribution of direct costs) shall be made available to public by the Council via ETIS.

23. Recovery of Grant

23.1. A grant not used for the intended purpose is recovered by the Council from the host institution along with a proportional fee of the overheads.

23.2. On circumstances stipulated in Section 15.9. the Council shall reclaim the unused part of the funding along with a proportional fee of the overheads.

23.3. The host institution is required to allow the Council or a person authorised by it to audit the use of a grant and assist it in every way, including allowing access to the premises and the territory of the host institution and submitting all the requested documents for the purpose of verifying the correctness of the submitted information.