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Mobilitas Pluss tipteadlase toetuse taotluste hindamisjuhend

Guidelines for evaluating top researcher grant applications

I Introduction

The award of top researcher grants has been stipulated in the „Guidelines for Mobilitas Pluss top researcher grant applications“.

These „Guidelines for evaluating top researcher grant applications “ is a document which specifies the evaluation criteria set forth in the „Guidelines for Mobilitas Pluss top researcher grant applications“.

The purpose of top researcher grants is to bring to Estonia top-level researchers with international experience, who would create a research group at an Estonian research and development institution and supervise doctoral students.

The grant period is from 36 months to 60 months.

II Relevant terms

- 1) **Top researcher grant** is a grant awarded to researchers coming from a foreign country to an Estonian research and development institution for implementation of a specific research and development project.
- 2) **Top researcher’s project** is a description of scientific research, which includes a clearly defined research problem and a specification of basic or applied research to be used for resolving the problem.
- 3) **Top Researcher** is a researcher with a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification who preferably corresponds to the R4 profile (leading researcher) or at least to the R3 profile (established researcher) of the European Framework for Research Careers. A top researcher is a leader of his or her field and head of a research group, has a good international professional reputation and publishes high-quality publications.

III Criteria for applying

Top Researcher is a person who:

- 1) has been working outside of Estonia for the past five years at least before the opening of the call for applications and, during this period, has not been in any employment relationship or law of obligations relationship with Estonian research and development institutions or businesses, except for contracts under the law of obligations concerning short-term performance of a one-off task (e.g., serving as an opponent in examination, reviewing, etc); and
- 2) at the time of implementing the top researcher's project, is working in Estonia for the host institution for at least 75% of the standard full-time working time.

IV Application

The application for funding for a top researcher's project (hereinafter *application*) shall include the following:

- 1) the host institution of the top researcher's project grant;
- 2) details of the top researcher;
- 3) the title of the top researcher's project;
- 4) a project summary;
- 5) the requested grant period;
- 6) the general theoretical background to the top researcher's project and its link to previous research carried out by the Top Researcher;
- 7) the main objectives of the research project, hypotheses, description of methods, and the annual research plans;
- 8) 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 such 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 at the time of submission of the application, applicants are asked to attach them to the application.
- 9) the expected results and their potential applicability, as well as possible future research directions;
- 10) a description of the Top Researcher's previous research and development activities in the last 10 years;
- 11) information on Estonian and international cooperation (incl. projects) in which the Top Researcher has participated in the last 10 years;
- 12) a description of the quality and adequacy of the infrastructure and research environment at the host institution for achieving the objectives of the research project;
- 13) the budget for the top researcher's project; and
- 14) the expected impact of the top researcher project on society, economic development, objectives of the measure and horizontal themes (equal opportunities, regional development, integrated public governance, promotion of information society).

V Evaluation

Top researcher grant applications shall be evaluated by the Evaluation Committee of the Estonian Research Council based on the conditions specified in §21 (4) of the 2014-2020 Structural Assistance Act, the Minister of Education and Research Regulation No. 74 "Procedure for Formation and Rules of Procedure of the Evaluation Committee of the Estonian Research Council", and the well-reasoned opinions of the individual reviewers and expert panels. The following evaluation criteria will be considered:

- 1) justification and scientific quality of the application (methods, expected results, including particular field-specific or application-related characteristics, plans for creation of a research group and supervision of doctoral students, etc);
- 2) the qualification of the Top Researcher and the capacity to implement the project;
- 3) infrastructure and research environment, budget and cost-efficiency of the application;
- 4) impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy, and on horizontal themes.

When evaluating applications, reviewers should take into account the following guidelines.

VI Evaluation criteria to be used for reviewing top researcher grant applications

Please make comments for all criteria.

1. Justification and scientific quality of the application

1.1. Is the application characterized by a conceptually innovative approach?

1.2. Is the application well-justified and clearly outlined and does it contain well-defined hypotheses and research questions?

1.3. Is the research plan clear and appropriate for its stated purpose and the elaboration of tasks justified and appropriate?

1.4. Are the proposed methods adequate, up-to-date and/or innovative?

1.5. Are there any ethical issues involved in the proposed research and if so, have they been adequately considered and addressed in the application?

1.6. Does the application describe the creation of a research group and supervision of doctoral students?

Other comments on Section 1.

Overall assessment of application justification and scientific quality.

2. The qualification of the Top Researcher and the capacity to implement the project

2.1. Is the Top Researcher an internationally recognised researcher who has had his/her research from the last 10 years widely acknowledged (in terms of the quality of publications, number of citations, etc.) and do the competencies of the Top Researcher support the achievement of the proposed objectives?

2.2. Has the Top Researcher been successful in obtaining additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.) in the last 10 years?

2.3. What is the Top Researcher's experience in the management of (international) research projects and grants and in participation in international collaborative projects in the last 10 years?

Other comments on Section 2.

Overall competence and expertise of the Top Researcher.

3. Infrastructure and research environment, budget and cost-efficiency of the application

This section will be evaluated only by the expert panel and the Evaluation Committee, not by external reviewers.

The evaluators should answer and comment on the following:

1.1. Is the budget appropriate for the planned research?

1.2. *Is the infrastructure and research environment at the host institution appropriate for achieving the objectives of the proposed research project?*

Other comments on Section 3.

Overall assessment of the quality and adequacy of research environment and budget.

4. Impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy, and on horizontal themes.

This section will be evaluated only by the expert panel and the Evaluation Committee, not by external reviewers.

The evaluators should answer and comment on the following:

4.1. Does the project help to achieve the Mobilitas Plus aims to strengthen the international competitiveness of Estonian researchers and research performing organisations, expand international collaboration and professional development opportunities by improving intersectoral and international mobility and cooperation?

4.2. Does the project have impact on the horizontal topics, i.e. regional development, environmental care and climate, civil society development, ensuring equal opportunities, state governing development, and information society development?

4.3. Does the project have impact on the development of Estonian society and economy?

Other comments on Section 4.

Overall impact on the development of Estonian society and economy.

Overall assessment of the application

This section will be filled in by the expert panel and the Evaluation Committee.

Overall comments on the application.

VI Rating scales to be used in the review

Rating scales

A five-point rating scale is used in evaluating the application (outstanding, very good, good, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory). The evaluation is provided to a level of precision of 0.5 points, i.e. intermediate values like very good – outstanding, good – very good, etc. can be used.

The numeric for evaluation in the drop-down menu are as follows:

- Outstanding (5);
- Very good (4);
- Good (3);
- Satisfactory (2);
- Unsatisfactory (1),

The final score can range from 1 to 5 and is calculated as an arithmetical mean from the sub-criteria points.

Threshold

Research projects which receive less than 3.5 points do not qualify for funding.

The rating scales correspond to the following descriptions:

1. Justification and scientific quality of the application

Outstanding

The research ideas are highly original and innovative. An internationally competitive research project.

The application addresses crucial/cutting-edge research questions or knowledge gap. The objectives are very clearly articulated and justified. The hypotheses and research questions are very well elaborated.

The research plan is very clearly described and relevant for achieving the objectives. The tasks are very well justified and appropriate.

The application includes highly original methodology and/or design. The methods are very clearly described, up-to-date, very well-articulated and highly relevant for achieving the objectives.

The application includes a comprehensive plan for creating a research group and supervising doctoral students.

Ethical issues are fully considered.

Very good

The research ideas are original and innovative, internationally competitive and cutting-edge nationally.

The project addresses an important research question or knowledge gap. The objectives are clearly articulated and justified. The hypotheses and research questions are mostly well elaborated.

The research plan is clearly described and relevant for achieving the objectives. The tasks are clearly justified and appropriate.

The application includes original methodology and/or design. The methods are clearly described, up-to-date, well-articulated and relevant for achieving the objectives.

The application includes a clear plan for creating a research group and supervising doctoral students.

Ethical issues are very well considered.

Good

The research ideas are original and partially internationally competitive.

The application addresses a worthwhile research question or knowledge gap. The hypotheses and research objectives need some additional elaboration.

The research plan needs some clarification. The tasks can be implemented but certain improvements and adjustments are necessary.

A methodologically sound study. The methods are articulated and justified, up-to-date and/or innovative to some extent.

The application includes a plan for creating a research group and supervising doctoral students.

Ethical issues are well-considered.

Satisfactory

The research ideas are somewhat original and innovative at the national level.

The application addresses a research question or knowledge gap. Justification needs additional clarifications and adjustments. The hypotheses and research questions need major additional elaboration.

The research plan needs some revision. Certain, but not all tasks can be implemented.

A methodologically sound study but some areas require revision. The methods are somewhat articulated and justified, not very up-to-date and/or innovative.

The application includes a partial plan for creating a research group or a plan for supervising doctoral students.

Ethical issues are adequately considered.

Unsatisfactory

The proposed topic has been exhaustively studied. Limited likelihood of new knowledge generation.

A poorly defined research topic, lack of clear hypotheses and research questions.

The research plan and elaboration of tasks need profound revision.

The methods are inadequate for achieving the overall goal, not up-to-date nor innovative.

The application does not include a plan for creating a research group and supervising doctoral students.

Ethical issues are not adequately considered.

2. The qualification of the Top Researcher and the capacity to implement the project

Outstanding

The applicant is among the leaders in his/her field. Publications and/or monographs are at an outstanding international level. Articles are published in the best peer-reviewed journals or proceedings indexed in the leading databases in the field. Monographs are published by international top publishers. The impact of the applicant (number of citations; impact factor of the journals where articles are published) is at an outstanding international level in the respective field.

The applicant shows impressive leadership abilities and skills. He/she has a lot of experience in the management of (international) research projects and grants and very good experience in participation in international collaborative projects.

The applicant has been very successful in obtaining additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.).

Very good

The applicant is renowned in his/her field. Publications and/or monographs are at a very good international level. Articles are published in respectable peer-reviewed journals or proceedings indexed in the leading databases of the field. Monographs are published by internationally acknowledged publishers. The impact of the applicant (number of citations; impact factor of the journals where articles are published) is at a very good international level in the respective field.

The applicant shows very good leadership abilities and skills. He/she has considerable experience in the management of (international) research projects and grants and in participation in international collaborative projects.

The applicant has been successful in obtaining additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.).

Good

The applicant is well-known in his/her field. Articles are published in peer-reviewed journals or international proceedings. Monographs are published by acknowledged publishers. The impact of the applicant (number of citations; the level of the journals where articles are published) is at a good international level in the respective field.

The applicant shows leadership abilities and skills. He/she has some experience in the management of (international) research projects and grants and in participation in international collaborative projects.

The applicant has obtained some additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.) in the past.

Satisfactory

The applicant is not well-known in his/her field. Articles are published in journals and proceedings which are not indexed in the leading databases in the field. No monographs have been published. The impact of the applicant (number of citations; the level of the journals where articles are published) does not reach an international level.

The applicant has limited experience in the management of (international) research projects and grants and/or in participation in international collaborative projects.

The applicant has obtained very little additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.).

Unsatisfactory

The applicant's research and publishing record are weak. The impact of the applicant (number of citations; the level of the journals where articles are published) is poor. There is insufficient potential for successfully implementing the proposed research plan. The competencies of the Principal Investigator do not support the achievement of the proposed objectives.

The applicant has almost no experience in the management of (international) research projects and grants and has not participated in any international collaborative projects.

The applicant has not been successful in obtaining additional funding (grants, sponsored research, etc.).

3. Infrastructure and research environment, budget and cost-efficiency of the application

Outstanding

The budget is very well justified.

The physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution fully meet the requirements and support the achievement of the established objectives.

Good

The budget is sufficient for the planned research, but not very cost-efficient.

The physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution partly meet the requirements and support the achievement of the established objectives.

Unsatisfactory

The budget is not justified.

The physical infrastructure and research environment at the host institution are not adequate and do not support the achievement of the established objectives.

4. Impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy, and on horizontal themes.

Outstanding

The application has a significant impact on the development of Estonian economy and society.

The project is relevant for achieving the objectives set in the Mobilitas Plus.

Good

The application has a potential impact on the development of Estonian economy and society.

The project is relevant to some extent for achieving the objectives set in the Mobilitas Plus.

Unsatisfactory

The application has modest impact on the development of Estonian economy and society.

The project is inadequate for achieving the objectives set in the Mobilitas Plus.