

Personaalse uurimistoetuse järeldoktori granti taotluste hindamisjuhend
Guidelines for Evaluating Personal Research Funding Applications for Postdoctoral Grants

1. Introduction

The award of personal research funding for postdoctoral grants has been stipulated in the “Conditions of and Procedure for Personal Research Funding Applications for Postdoctoral Grants”.

“Guidelines for Evaluating Personal Research Funding Applications for Postdoctoral Grants” is a document which specifies the evaluation criteria set forth in the “Conditions of and Procedure for Personal Research Funding Applications for Postdoctoral Grants”.

2. Relevant terms

Personal research funding means funding allocated for a high-quality research and development (R&D) project carried out by a person or a research group working at an R&D institution, incl. the research scholarships for students (as specified in the Organisation of Research and Development Act). Personal research funding comprises three categories of grants corresponding to different levels of a research career: postdoctoral grants, start-up grants, and team grants:

- A **postdoctoral research grant** is a grant aimed at supporting the launch of a research career of the people with a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification at strong R&D institutions or among highly qualified research groups. There are two types of postdoctoral grants:
 - a grant for a postdoctoral researcher coming to Estonia (Mobilitas Plus postdoctoral grant);
 - a grant for a postdoctoral researcher going abroad (personal research funding postdoctoral grant).
- A **start-up grant** is a grant aimed at supporting researchers with initial research experience to launch their independent research career at an Estonian R&D institution, to set up their research group, and to contribute to educating the next generation of researchers (incl. doctoral students).
- A **team grant** is a grant aimed at supporting researchers working at Estonian R&D institutions

in continuing their research career, ensuring high-quality research, leading a strong research group, and educating the next generation of researchers (incl. doctoral students).

A **research project** is a description of research activities with a clearly defined and justified research problem/topic and the methodology to address this problem/topic.

A **Principal Investigator (PI)** is a researcher who applies for a team grant, start-up grant, or postdoctoral grant (i.e., the postdoctoral fellow) and has received the consent from the host institution.

A **host institution** is an Estonian R&D institution that has signed an employment contract with the researcher for implementing the postdoctoral project if such a contractual relationship did not already exist at the time of awarding the postdoctoral grant.

A **collaborating institution** is a foreign R&D institution where the outgoing postdoctoral fellow will carry out the postdoctoral project.

3. Criteria for applying

3.1. An **outgoing postdoctoral fellow** is a person who:

3.1.1. has obtained a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification no more than five years prior to the closing date of the call. If the applicant has been on pregnancy, maternity or parental leave, or in compulsory military service after obtaining the doctoral degree, the period of qualification is extended by the corresponding period in full months, rounded up to the higher number of months. In justified cases, the Evaluation Committee may consider eligible an applicant who does not have a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification at the time of submitting the application, provided that the applicant will obtain a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification before entering into the grant contract;

3.1.2. has undertaken doctoral studies at and has obtained a doctoral degree from an Estonian university and has not previously received postdoctoral research funding from the Estonian Research Council (hereinafter *Council*);

3.1.3. has studied or worked in Estonia for at least 12 months by the closing date of the call.

3.2. A **postdoctoral supervisor** is a researcher who:

3.2.1. has a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification;

3.2.2. has an employment contract with the foreign collaborating institution.

3.2.3. The supervisor cannot be the same person who has been the (co-)supervisor of the applicant's doctoral dissertation.

4. Application

4.1. The application for a postdoctoral grant (hereinafter *application*) shall include the following:

4.1.1. information about the postdoctoral fellow, the supervisor of postdoctoral research, and as

- an exception and in justified cases, the co-supervisor of postdoctoral research. The qualification of the co-supervisor will not be evaluated;
- 4.1.2. a letter of confirmation from the collaborating institution;
 - 4.1.3. the title of the project in Estonian and in English;
 - 4.1.4. a summary of the project in Estonian and in English;
 - 4.1.5. the requested grant period;
 - 4.1.6. the grant type applied for pursuant to the fixed amounts set out in the “Guidelines for Budgeting Personal Research Funding Applications” and its justification, incl. the distribution of direct costs;
 - 4.1.7. the scientific background of the project, incl. (if applicable) the interdisciplinarity and intersectorality of the project;
 - 4.1.8. the main objectives of the project, hypotheses, methods, and the work plan, incl. tentative annual work plans and the availability of the infrastructure necessary for achieving the objectives of the project;
 - 4.1.9. the expected results and their potential applicability, importance for Estonian research, culture, society, and/or economy as well as the impact on the career opportunities of the postdoctoral fellow and possible directions for future research;
 - 4.1.10. an explanation about how the results of the project will be disseminated to the public;
 - 4.1.11. an explanation about how the compliance with ethical issues will be secured during the implementation of the project and a comment on whether the project requires a licence from a specific ethics committee or the licence has already been obtained, and if the project necessitates compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, an explanation about which genetic resources will be used and whether the project requires the due diligence declaration or the due diligence declaration has already been submitted;
 - 4.1.12. an explanation about which data will be generated during the implementation of the project and how the data will be managed;
 - 4.1.13. a description of the applicant’s previous R&D activities;
 - 4.1.14. a description of the supervisor’s R&D activities and experience in supervising doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows during the past 10 years;
 - 4.1.15. if necessary, additional documents, incl. applications for making the exceptions regarding the award of the doctoral degree or equivalent qualification or the implementation of the project partially in Estonia, and a confirmation letter detailing that the host institution will enter into an employment contract with the applicant for implementing the project if such a contractual relationship does not already exist at the time of submitting the application;
 - 4.1.16. a confirmation that the principles of research ethics and good research practice will be

adhered to during the conception and implementation of the project.

Please keep in mind that the applicants have a limited number of characters they can use to describe each part of their project.

5. Evaluation process

5.1. The grant applications will be evaluated by the Evaluation Committee of the Council based on the well-reasoned opinions of at least two independent reviewers and the Expert Panel.

5.2. All applications are evaluated according to the same rules and procedures and all of them are treated equally. The final ranking list of the applications is formed by taking into consideration all relevant information and by comparing the applications in this particular call in field-specific ranking lists.

5.3. An overview of the bibliometric indicators of the supervisor as an additional material for evaluation is used by the Expert Panel and by the Evaluation Committee for providing background information when evaluating the applications.

6. Evaluation criteria and rating scale to be used for reviewing postdoctoral grants

6.1. Evaluation criteria

When evaluating the applications, the following guiding questions are to be used for clearly explaining the opinions and justifying the ratings. Please comment on all criteria.

Criterion	Guiding questions	Rating scale
1. Justification for and feasibility of the research project, incl. objectives, methods, resources, and infrastructure	1.1. Is the application well justified and clearly outlined and does it contain well-defined hypotheses and research questions? 1.2. Are the proposed methods adequate and up-to-date? 1.3. Is the research plan clear and appropriate for its stated purpose and the elaboration on tasks justified and appropriate? 1.4. Does the research environment, incl. the research infrastructure, support achieving the objectives of the proposed project? 1.5. Has it been clearly outlined where and how the expected results of the project will be used? Other comments on criterion 1.	From 1 to 5
2. Potential applicability of the expected results,	2.1. Does the project contribute to the development of the research field significantly?	From 1 to 5

<p>taking the specifics of the research field into account</p>	<p>2.2. Are the expected results of the project potentially applicable and is there potential for further research? Other comments on criterion 2.</p>	
<p>3. The qualification of the applicant</p>	<p>3.1. What are the merits and scientific expertise of the applicant? 3.2. Are the competencies of the applicant appropriate and sufficient for the proposed project? 3.3. Does the applicant demonstrate the potential to lead independent research and show maturity? (The quality and results of the applicant's previous research activities; experience in (international) cooperation; the number and quality of publications; experience in participating in research projects (home and abroad), attending conferences; skills obtained and other research-related activities, and how the project will contribute to the training of the applicant and promote his/her research career.) Other comments on criterion 3.</p>	<p>From 1 to 5</p>
<p>4. The qualification of the supervisor</p>	<p>4.1. Is the supervisor's experience in supervising postdoctoral fellows and doctoral students sufficient for supporting the project? 4.2. Does his/her research and results during the last 10 years indicate a sound qualification for supervising the postdoctoral fellow? (The number and quality of publications, the experience in supervising doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows; the scope of managing and/or participating in domestic and/or international R&D projects, and other research-related activities.) Other comments on criterion 4.</p>	<p>From 1 to 5</p>
<p>5. Ethical issues The applicants are required to consider the potential risks related to ethical issues of any procedure in the research projects. The applicants are asked to describe how the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent,</p>	<p>5.1. Has the applicant carefully considered and sufficiently addressed potential ethical issues? Other comments on criterion 5.</p>	<p>0 or 1</p>

<p>confidentiality, and anonymity of the subjects will be followed. The use of research methods that require a review or approval from a specific ethics committee should also be clearly indicated in the application (the need for such approvals will be checked by the Expert Panel). If the project necessitates compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, the applicant has to be aware of the fact that he/she has to obtain the due diligence declaration.</p>		
<p>6. Data management The applicants are expected to describe which data will be created, managed, collected, and protected; which methods and standards will be applied; will the data be shared or made public and in which way; how the data will be stored during the period of the project and preserved after the end of the project. The applicants are expected to consider the issues related to the secure storage of data either obtained or used during the period of the project and make them available based on the open data principles (if not restricted due to data protection requirements).</p>	<p>6.1. Have data management issues, incl. data protection, been sufficiently addressed? Other comments on criterion 6.</p>	<p>0 or 1</p>
<p>7. Importance for Estonian research, culture, society, and/or economy</p>	<p>7.1. Has the applicant analysed and described the importance of the project for Estonia? 7.2. Will the project increase the visibility of Estonian research?</p>	<p>From 1 to 5</p>

<p><i>This criterion will be evaluated only by the Expert Panel and the Evaluation Committee</i></p>	<p>7.3. Do the planned outcomes of the project enhance cultural enrichment, quality of life, health and/or well-being?</p> <p>7.4. Does the project enhance the potential and future career prospects of the postdoctoral fellow?</p> <p>7.5. Does the project enhance intersectorality (mobility between the academic and non-academic sector) and international networking?</p> <p>7.6. Is the topic significant in the Estonian context?</p> <p>Other comments on criterion 7.</p>	
<p>8. Justification for the grant type (experimental or non-experimental)</p> <p><i>This criterion will be evaluated only by the Expert Panel and the Evaluation Committee</i></p>	<p>8.1. Has the grant type been clarified and is it justified?</p> <p>8.2. Is estimation of the project costs realistic against the objectives?</p> <p>Other comments on criterion 8.</p>	<p>0 or 1</p>

6.2. Rating procedure

6.2.1. A **five-point rating scale** is used for criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7. The evaluation is provided to a level of precision of 0.5 points.

- Outstanding (5);
- Very good-Outstanding (4.5);
- Very good (4);
- Good-Very good (3.5);
- Good (3);
- Satisfactory-Good (2.5);
- Satisfactory (2);
- Unsatisfactory-Satisfactory (1.5);
- Unsatisfactory (1).

For criterion 7 (Importance for Estonian research, culture, society, and/or economy), the **coefficient** 0.8 is applied.

6.2.2. An **undifferentiated rating scale** is used for evaluating criteria 5, 6, and 8:

- Appropriate (1);
- Inappropriate (0).

6.2.3. **The final score** can range from 4.8 to 27 points.

6.2.4. Interpretation of ratings for criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7:

- Unsatisfactory (1) – the application addresses many of the aspects of the evaluation criteria inadequately and/or there are serious inherent scientific weaknesses.
- Satisfactory (2) – the application addresses most of the aspects of the evaluation criteria in very general terms and there are significant weaknesses. Major revision and clarification would be needed to significantly improve the application.
- Good (3) – the application addresses most of the relevant aspects of the evaluation criteria well, but a number of shortcomings are present. Some questions on methodology, scope, and/or relevance of the project could be elaborated on more thoroughly and more clearly. A sound research project with some issues to be considered.
- Very good (4) – the application addresses all relevant aspects of the evaluation criteria very well and only a small number of shortcomings are present. Minor revision and clarification would be suggested. A strong research project worthy of funding.
- Outstanding (5) – the application is very well elaborated and successfully addresses all aspects of the evaluation criteria. Any shortcomings are minor. A very promising project.

6.2.5. Interpretation of ratings for criteria 5, 6, and 8

- Appropriate (1) – potential risks related to ethical issues and data management issues have been sufficiently addressed (please add a comment). The requested grant type and amount are well justified.
- Inappropriate (0) – potential risks related to ethical issues and data management issues have not been sufficiently addressed (adding a comment is obligatory).

6.3. Threshold

The funding threshold for criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 is 3 points (*good*) before applying the coefficient and for criteria 5, and 6 is 1 point (*appropriate*). If an application receives less points than the threshold for at least one criterion, it does not qualify for funding.

7. Overall assessment and the final score for the application

This section will be filled in by the Evaluation Committee.

7.1. The final score for the application is a sum of justified assessment scores for all criteria (1-8) by the Evaluation Committee. The main arguments underlying the scores as well as the main strengths and weaknesses will be pointed out here.

7.2. If the budget is too small for funding all the projects which qualify for funding, then the procedure shall be as follows:

- 7.2.1. based on the final evaluation and scores, the Evaluation Committee will compile a ranking list for all applications.

- 7.2.2. the applications of equal standing will be ranked according to the scores received during the evaluation process in the very order of the evaluation criteria (i.e., as specified above);
 - 7.2.3. the applications which sustain equal standing after the ranking procedure described in 7.2.2. will be prioritised according to the underrepresented gender among the applicants to be funded;
 - 7.2.4. the applications which sustain equal standing for all aforementioned criteria will be prioritised in order to create more diversity of the R&D fields.
- 7.3. The projects will be funded in the order they appear in the ranking list.