



THE ICELANDIC RESEARCH FUND HANDBOOK

Annual Handbook Published in Relation to
the Call for Proposals

Rules for the Grant Year 2027

The Board of the Research Fund has approved the Handbook for the grant year 2027.

Main changes from the previous version:

- Startup Grants (section 3.3.3):
 - Only granted for 60 months (not less).
 - Applications evaluated in a two-step process.
 - Applicants can apply in other grant categories.
 - The names of two referees must be provided in the application (the IRF contacts referees after the application deadline).
 - In addition to a CV, a one-page narrative on research experience and outstanding achievements must accompany the application.
- Project Leader (PL) of Grants of excellence and Project Grants must hold a position at the accounting institution on the date of the submission of the application and during the proposed grant period (section 3.1).
- The project description template is longer for Startup Grants and Doctoral Student Grants (section 4.3).
- CV longer, i.e. up to three pages long (section 4.4.1).
- Applications with undated and/or unsigned letters of intent will be rejected (section 4.4.3).
- Use of AI must be transparent, ethical and responsible, and respect legal and research standards and requirements (section 4.5).
- Expert panels' grades changed from an alphabetical scale to the numerical scale 1-7 (section 9.1.4).

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1 Introduction

The Icelandic Research Fund (IRF) is an open, competitive fund that supports scientific research and research-related postgraduate studies. To this end, the fund provides grants to students in research-related postgraduate studies and defined research projects that promote scientific research in Iceland.

The IRF awards grants according to the general priorities of the Ministerial Committee on Science and Innovation and based on a professional assessment of the quality of research projects, the competence of the individuals conducting the research, and their facilities to carry out the project.

Research projects can be of various kinds and span all fields of science and scholarship; the fund is an open competitive fund and does not prioritize one field over another.

The fund operates under the Act on Public Support for Scientific Research No. 3 of 2003. The scope of the fund is determined by the annual state budget.

The English version of the IRF Handbook is a translation of the Icelandic version. The original Icelandic text is the authoritative reference. In case of any discrepancies between this translation and the authoritative text, the latter will prevail.

2 Timeline

The application deadline for the Icelandic Research Fund is announced with a minimum of six weeks' notice. No information of documents are accepted after the deadline has passed.

15 June 2026	Submission deadline
July - December 2026	Expert Panel work and meetings
January 2027	Funding decision

Table 1. The estimated timeframe for the call.

Homepage of the Icelandic Research Fund:

www.rannsoknasjodur.is

The IRF receives inquiries on the email address:

rannsoknasjodur@rannis.is

3 Rules and instructions for applicants

3.1 Eligibility of applicants

Main applicants, except those applying for Doctoral Student Grants, must have completed graduate studies at an internationally recognized university. Project Leaders (PL) of Project Grants, Grants of Excellence and Startup Grants, and those applying for Postdoctoral Fellowships, are required to have obtained a PhD or an equivalent degree, along with progressively increasing research experience relevant to the specific grant category.

One can only be a PL or Principal Investigator (PI) on one application within the same grant category. Applicants for Doctoral Student Grant and Postdoctoral Fellowships cannot submit applications in other grant categories. Applicants for Grants of Excellence may simultaneously apply for a Project Grant, provided it stands as an independent research project. However, no grant is awarded to more than one project with the same PL or PI.

Members of IRF's board and its expert panels cannot participate in applications to the fund.

Universities: For Project Grants and Grants of Excellence, the PL must hold at least a 20% salaried academic position at the accounting institution of the application, i.e. a university in Iceland, on the date of the submission of the application and during the proposed grant period. Individuals with unpaid guest positions at Icelandic universities do not meet this requirement. Individuals holding academic positions at universities abroad, regardless of percentage, cannot be PLs.

Other institutions and legal entities: The PL must have dedicated facilities at the accounting institution of the application, i.e. a legal entity in Iceland, on the date of the submission of the application and during the proposed grant period.

3.2 On Participants

In Grants of Excellence, Project Grants and Startup Grants, participants are defined thus:

Direct participants:

- **Principal Investigator (PI)** belongs to the core team of the project and is one of those directing the research.
 - **Project Leader (PL)** is the PI who leads the project, is responsible for its management and is the contact person for the fund.
- **Co-Proposer** is outside the core team of the project but is an active participant in the research.
- **Graduate Students** are Master- or Doctoral Students recruited into the project and supervised by PIs or Co-proposers.
- **Postdoctoral Researchers** who are recruited into the project.

Indirect participants:

- **External Collaborators** are external parties with limited participation in the project.

Others:

- **Research Assistants** who are recruited for specific tasks.

3.3 Grant categories

Five types of grants are offered. Grants of Excellence, Project Grants, Postdoctoral Fellowships, and Doctoral Student Grants are awarded for up to 36 months. Startup Grants are awarded for 60 months. Except for equipment purchases and contracted services, a 25% overhead is automatically added to the awarded grant to fund joint operations and facilities. For grant amounts, see Table 2.

Grant category	Max. grant amount	Overhead (25%)	Total amount w/ overhead
Grant of Excellence	148.410.000	37.102.500	185.512.500
Startup Grant	106.080.000	26.520.000	132.600.000
Project Grant	63.752.000	15.938.000	79.690.000
Postdoctoral Fellowship	37.524.000	9.381.000	46.905.000
Doctoral Student Grant	26.500.000	6.625.000	33.125.000

Table 2. Grant types, maximum grant amounts in ISK and calculated overhead (overhead is not calculated on contracted services and purchase of equipment).

3.3.1 Grants of Excellence

Grants of Excellence are intended for research groups undertaking extensive research projects that are likely to move Icelandic research to the forefront of the international stage. Grants of Excellence are intended for research groups, which should include Co-proposers in addition to the Project Leader (PL) and Principal Investigators (PI). Training of young scientists through the involvement of postgraduate students and/or postdoctoral researchers is a key aspect of Grants of Excellence.

PLs of Grants of Excellence are expected to have a high level of experience in managing research projects.

One cannot be a PL or PI on more than one application for a Grant of Excellence.

If a PL or PI has previously received a Grant of Excellence, the project must be completed and the final report approved before a new grant agreement can be finalized. If this does not occur by April 1st following the allocation, the new grant will be forfeited.

If a PL or PI has received a Project Grant or Grant of Excellence in the last allocation, they are not eligible to apply for a Project Grant.

Applications for Grants of Excellence go through a two-step process. First, expert panels evaluate and rank applications. The Board then invites a representative of the top proposals for interviews and subsequently decides on the grants awarded. Only a few Grants of Excellence are awarded each year, and their number can vary from year to year.

It is possible to apply for salaries, operational costs, travel expenses, publication costs, and for purchase of equipment and contracted services.

Grants of Excellence are awarded for up to 36 months; see Table 2 for grant amounts.

3.3.2 Project Grants

Project Grants are intended for research projects that are likely to deliver results on an international scale. The training of young scientists through the involvement of postgraduate students and/or

postdoctoral researchers strengthens the application. In certain academic fields, it may strengthen applications if a research group is behind them.

For Project Leaders (PLs), a minimum of three years of research experience post-PhD is required.

One cannot be a Project Leader or Principal Investigator (PL/PI) on more than one Project Grant application.

If a PL or PI received a Project Grant in the last allocation, they are not eligible to apply for a Project Grant.

It is possible to apply for salaries, operational costs, travel expenses, publication costs, and for purchase of equipment and contracted services.

Project Prants are awarded for up to 36 months; see Table 2 for grant amounts.

3.3.3 Startup Grants

Startup Grants are aimed at enabling outstanding young scientists to establish independent research at Icelandic universities or research institutions. The grants are intended for applicants with three to ten years of active research experience post-PhD who have demonstrated exceptional achievements (breaks in research career for valid reasons, such as parental leave or sick leave, are taken into account if noted in CV). The grant is awarded to an individual and can be transferred between host institutions in Iceland, but the recipient cannot transfer the grant to institutions abroad.

A statement from the host institution, signed by an authorized individual, confirming that the applicant will have work and research facilities during the grant period must accompany the application.

Letters of recommendation: Names of two referees must be provided in the application, i.e. experts not participating in proposal. The IRF will contact the referees after the application deadline.

Applications for Startup Grants go through a two-step process. First, expert panels evaluate and rank applications. The Board then invites a representative of the top proposals for interviews and subsequently decides on the grants awarded. A very few Startup Grants are awarded each year.

It is possible to apply for salaries, operational costs, travel expenses, publication costs, and for purchase of equipment and contracted services.

Startup Grants are only awarded to projects that last 60 months; it is not possible to apply for a shorter project period. See Table 2 for details on grant amounts.

3.3.4 Postdoctoral Fellowships

Postdoctoral Fellowships are intended to support the career development of young scientists. Applicants must have completed their PhD no more than five years before the application deadline (breaks in research career for valid reasons, such as parental leave or sick leave, are taken into account if noted in CV). A confirmation from the host institution must accompany the application signed by an authorized individual, confirming that the applicant will have work and research facilities during the grant period; it strengthens the application if the position is at an institution other than that which awarded the doctorate. A copy of the PhD diploma must accompany the application or be submitted by December 1st following the application deadline

An applicant for a Postdoctoral Fellowship cannot take on the role of Project Leader or Principal Investigator (PL/PI) on Grants of Excellence or Project Grants.

Letters of recommendation: Names of two referees must be provided in the application, i.e. experts that do not participate in proposal. The IRF contacts the referees after the application deadline.

The grant is awarded to an individual and the postdoctoral position is considered full-time employment (100%). If the recipient accepts any paid position during the grant period, the grant will be terminated from the moment employment begins, regardless of whether it is full-time or part-time. In exceptional cases, the recipient may be permitted to teach at the university level, up to 20% of a full-time position.

The grant can be transferred between host institutions in Iceland but cannot be transferred to institutions abroad.

It is possible to apply for salaries, operational costs, travel expenses, publication costs, and contracted services.

Postdoctoral Fellowships are awarded for up to 36 months; see Table 2 for grant amounts.

3.3.5 Doctoral Student Grants

Doctoral Student Grants are intended for doctoral students who apply in their own name in consultation with their supervisors. Applicants must have an approved doctoral project (with or without requirements for funding) at an Icelandic university, and a certificate from the postgraduate committee of the relevant department/field, or equivalent, must accompany the application. The doctorate must be awarded by an Icelandic university, but a joint degree with a university abroad is possible.

Letters of recommendation: Names of two referees must be provided in the application, i.e. experts that do not participate in proposal. The IRF contacts the referees after the application deadline.

Doctoral Student Grants are for students in full-time doctoral studies who do not receive salaries from other employment, except for teaching, which can account for up to 20% of their workload.

It is only possible to apply for the salary and travel expenses of the doctoral student; other project-related costs cannot be applied for (see Table 3).

Doctoral Student Grants are awarded for up to 36 months; see Table 2 for grant amounts.

3.4 Approved expenses

Approved expenses include salaries, operating costs, travel and publication expenses, equipment purchases, and contracted services (Table 3). On behalf of the IRF Board, the fund's staff has the mandate to review cost items, including salaries, before signing contracts. Own contribution is not required but it is necessary to account for the project's total cost.

Grant category	Operational costs	Travel costs	Publication costs	Purchase of equipment	Contracted services
Grant of Excellence	x	x	1.500.000	3.000.000	max 20%
Project Grant	x	x	750.000	3.000.000	max 20%
Startup Grant	x	x	750.000	3.000.000	max 20%
Postdoctoral Fellow	x	800.000/year	750.000	n/a	max 20%
Doctoral Student	n/a	400.000/year	n/a	n/a	n/a

Table 3. Approved maximum expenses (other than salaries) for each grant category.

3.4.1 Salaries

The IRF provides funding for the salaries of scientists, postgraduate students, and researchers. Salaries can only be applied for individuals with facilities at Icelandic institutions or legal entities. The fund does not cover salaries for individuals working or living abroad, including postgraduate students, postdoctoral researchers, or other participants.

Applicants should consider general wage and institutional agreements when calculating salaries. Salary costs are determined by full wages plus associated expenses. Outsourced rates should not be used as a benchmark for salary calculations.

Postdoctoral researchers, postgraduate students or assistants do not need to be named but their contributions must be defined in the application.

It is possible to apply for salaries for up to 12 months for each master's student and up to 36 months for PhD students. If applying for doctoral students or postdoctoral researchers in more than one application, the same individual cannot receive a higher combined grant than 12 person-months per year.

The IRF does not support salary payments for those who are fully salaried in other jobs (including pensioners), overtime payments, or payments for purchasing teaching discounts.

The IRF is not an employer, and the grantee is not in an employment relationship with the fund. Grants are paid to the accounting institution of the grantee, which is responsible for salary payments and the rights of the employed.

3.4.2 Operating costs

It is possible to apply for costs related to necessary supplies and operations, except for Doctoral Student Grants. A detailed breakdown of all operating costs must be provided in the application. Costs related to joint operations and facilities, including general office equipment such as computers, cannot be applied for. Unexplained costs will not be approved.

Travel expenses and contracted services do not fall under general operational costs.

Costs for access to research infrastructure, whether domestic or abroad, fall under purchased services and not operating costs.

Operating costs should generally not exceed 20% of the project's total grant (without overhead).

In special cases, it is possible to apply for up to ISK 3 million per year in additional funding for increased operating costs. A detailed justification for the exceptional circumstances warranting higher operating funding must be provided. Each case will be evaluated by the fund's board, which decides whether additional funding will be granted or not.

Additional funding does not pertain to any other budget categories than operating costs.

3.4.3 Travel costs

It is possible to apply for costs related to trips that are essential for the project's progress. Justification must be provided for all travel and how it relates to the project. The fund only supports travel for direct participants in the project, not external collaborators (see section 3.2); if applicants deem the travel of such parties necessary for the project's progress, they may specify the costs under contracted services; note that per diem (board and accommodation) for such individuals is not supported.

Travel costs applied for doctoral students and/or postdoctoral researchers cannot be used for any other participants in the project.

For Postdoctoral Fellowships, only the travel costs for the postdoctoral fellow are covered; for Doctoral Student Grants, only the travel costs for the doctoral student are covered.

Travel costs should adhere to governmental rules regarding travel expenses for state employees.¹

Travel costs for conferences and shorter meetings:

- Abroad: The fund supports travel costs for project participants attending conferences and short meetings. Per diem is capped at the rates for travel abroad.
- For domestic travel, the main principle is to pay according to invoices, as per the government's guidelines: *"Attention is drawn to the following general rule, i.e. to pay the cost of domestic travel, e.g., fares, food and accommodation, according to the invoices."*

Travel costs for research trips and longer meetings:

- Abroad, the travel cost for longer research trips, such as fieldwork, is paid in accordance with the government's guidelines: "Per diems for training, studies or supervisory work amount to 2/3 of the general per diem."
- Domestically, the travel cost for longer research trips, such as fieldwork, is paid in accordance to the government's guidelines: *"Attention is drawn to the following general rule, i.e. to pay the cost of domestic travel, e.g., fares, food and accommodation, according to the invoices."*

3.4.4 Publishing costs

It is possible to apply for funding to cover costs associated with peer-reviewed publications for Grants of Excellence, Project Grants and Postdoctoral Fellowships. See amounts in Table 3.

¹ <https://www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/mannaudsmal-rikisins/kjarasamningar-laun-og-starfskior/ferdakostnadir/>

3.4.5 Purchase of equipment

It is possible for the purchase of equipment over the grant period. Purchase of equipment applies only to Grants of Excellence, Project Grants and Startup Grants. A quote from the seller/manufacturer for the equipment purchase must be provided at the time of the contract signing. More expensive equipment can be applied for through the Infrastructure Fund. For amounts, see Table 3.

Overhead does not apply for equipment purchases.

3.4.6 Contracted services

Contracted services include costs for tasks not performed by direct participants, including those defined as External collaborators in the application.

Costs for access to research infrastructure, whether domestic or international, fall under purchased services.

The application must detail what the purchased services entail and all associated costs.

A quote for purchased services, including access to research infrastructure, must be provided at the time of contract signing.

Costs for purchased services should generally not exceed 20% of the total Project Grant (excluding overhead).

Overhead does not apply to purchased services.

3.4.7 Overhead

An additional 25% overhead is added to the awarded grant to fund joint operations and facilities (see Table 2). This includes costs for office and research facilities, such as rent, heating, electricity, management of operational units, book and journal purchases, and the acquisition and maintenance of computer equipment.

Overhead does not apply to equipment purchases or contracted services.

3.4.8 Transfer of funds between cost items

Prior approval is required for transfers of more than 10% of the total amount of each grant year (without overhead) between different cost items.

Approval is always required for any changes in the use of funds allocated to doctoral and master's students, as well as postdoctoral researchers. Each request will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

4 Application form and supporting documents

4.1 Electronic application form

Applications are only accepted through the Rannís electronic application system.

4.2 Disciplines of Expert Panels

Seven Expert panels evaluate applications (see Table 4). The Board of the IRF appoints up to seven active scientists to each Expert panel. Expert panel members are appointed based on their expertise in the relevant field.

Applicants choose the Expert panel they wish to evaluate their application; additionally, they can mark up to three subcategories (of disciplines). A further reference to relevant fields is found in keywords. IRF staff, in consultation with the chairpersons of the Expert panels, reserve the right to move applications between Expert panels if there are substantive reasons for doing so.

Applicants may under no circumstances contact the Expert Panel members during the evaluation process. All inquiries shall be directed to IRF staff. If an applicant contacts an Expert panel member regarding an application, the application will immediately be withdrawn from further evaluation.

Expert Panel	Scientific disciplines
Physical sciences and mathematics	Physical science Chemical science Earth science Mathematics
Engineering and technical sciences	Engineering Computer science Technical science
Natural and environmental sciences	Biological science Other natural science (except earth science)
Biomedical sciences	Molecular biology Cellular biology General medicine and veterinary medicine
Clinical sciences and public health	Public health Health science Other medical science
Social and educational sciences	Social science Law and economics Educational science Psychology (other than clinical and physiological)
Humanities and arts	Philosophy and religion History and archaeology Arts and design Languages and literature Other humanities

Table 4. Disciplines of IRF Expert panels.

4.3 Project description and Reference list

The project description must be submitted using the fund's template, which is available in the electronic application system. Note that the template may change from year to year, and to ensure fairness for all applicants, applications that do not use the correct template will be rejected; this also applies if the template is altered. Such rejection can occur at any stage of the evaluation process.

Before uploading the project description to the application system, the reference list should be separated and saved as a separate document. These two documents should be uploaded separately as PDF files.

The project description includes a cover page and a guidance page. The maximum number of pages varies by grant category (see Table 5). There is no page limit for the reference list.

Grant categorie	Project description	Project desctiption w/title page & guidelines
Grant of Excellence	20	22
Startup Grant	20	22
Project Grant	15	17
Postdoctoral Fellow	12	14
Doctoral Student	8	10

Tafla 5. Maximum number of pages in the project description template.

4.4 Other supporting documents

Grant categories	CV	Letter of intent	PhD certificate	Conf. of host inst./ PhD studies	Letter of recommendation
Grant of Excellence	x	x	n/a	n/a	n/a
Project Grant	x	x	n/a	n/a	n/a
Startup Grant	x	x	x	x	x
Postdoctoral Fellow	x	x	x	x	x
Doctoral Student	(x)	n/a	n/a	x	x

Table 6. Required supporting documents for grant categories. Specific documents are needed for Startup Gr., Postdoctoral Fellow. and Doctoral Student Gr. Brackets (x) means optional document.

4.4.1 Curriculum vitae

The CV should be concise and no longer than three pages. It is possible to refer to a website with a list of publications, such as ORCID. The CV should include information on:

- The applicant's current position.
- Education and training.
- Supervision of postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers.
- Previous positions and awards.
- Up to five articles or book chapters relevant to the project.
- Startup Grants, Postdoctoral Fellowships and Doctoral Student Grants: Any career breaks due to parental leave, sick leave, or other reasons should be noted.

In addition to a CV, applicants for Startup Grants must submit a one-page narrative statement about their research experience and outstanding achievements.

4.4.2 Letters of Recommendation

In the application system, applicants for Startup Grants, Postdoctoral Fellowships and Doctoral Student Grants must provide the names and email addresses of two experts not participating in the application who are willing to write letters of recommendation.

NOTE: After the application deadline the IRF will contact the referees (not the applicant).

4.4.3 Letter of Intent of External Collaborators

A Letter of intent (LOI) from those listed as External collaborators, specifying their involvement in the project, shall accompany the application. The letter shall be no longer than one page.

The LOI must be signed and dated on the application year. Applications with undated and/or unsigned LOIs will be rejected.

4.4.4 Doctoral degree certificate

If applying for a Postdoctoral Fellowships, a doctoral degree certificate must be submitted to the IRF no later than December 1st after the application deadline. The certificate shall be sent to the IRF's email address (see section 2).

4.4.5 Confirmation facilities from the host institution

For Startup Grants and Postdoctoral Fellowships. A statement from the host institution, signed by an authorized individual, confirming that the applicant will have work and research facilities there during the grant period, should the grant be awarded. The statement should be no longer than one page.

4.4.6 Confirmation of an approved doctoral project

Applicants for Doctoral Student Grants must have an approved doctoral project (with or without conditions for funding) at an Icelandic university. A certificate from the postgraduate committee of the relevant department/field, or equivalent, must accompany the application.

4.5 Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become part of scientific work and research. All use of AI must be ethical and responsible, and respect legal and research standards and requirements. The use of generative AI must be transparent. Applicants are advised to read the European Commission's Living guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research.²

The Icelandic Research Fund does not use AI to evaluate or manage applications.

² https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2b6cf7e5-36ac-41cb-aab5-0d32050143dc_en?filename=ec_rtd_ai-guidelines.pdf

5 Handling of applications

5.1 Rejections of applications

Applications are pre-screened by experts of the Research Fund at Rannís. Incomplete applications and those that do not comply with the fund's rules are rejected without further evaluation, and the applicant is notified.

The main reasons for rejection are as follows (the list is not exhaustive):

- The correct template for the project description is not used.
- The template for the project description has been altered.
- The application is incomplete, which includes when mandatory fields are ignored (e.g. by putting in signs such as “x” or “n/a”).
- The application and/or supporting documents are not in English.
- The Project Leader (*PL*) of an application for a Grant of Excellence, Project Grant, Startup Grant, or Postdoctoral Fellowship has not completed a PhD or equivalent (applicant for Postdoctoral Fellowships have until December 1st to submit their PhD diploma).
- The applicant for a Doctoral Student Grant does not have an approved doctoral project at an Icelandic university.
- The PL of a Grant of Excellence or a Project Grant does not hold a position at the accounting institution of the application on the date of the submission of the application and during the proposed grant period.
- PL or PI is on more than one application in the same grant category. This applies to all grant categories.
- The applicant has contacted an expert panel member.
- An External collaborator's Letter of intent is undated and/or unsigned.
- Suspicion of misconduct.

5.2 Expert Panel evaluation of applications

Valid applications are evaluated by the relevant Expert Panel, which seeks the opinion of two or more external experts for applications for Grants of Excellence, Project Grants and Startup Grants. Generally, the opinions of external experts are not sought in the case Postdoctoral Fellowships and Doctoral Student Grant applications. The Expert Panel processes each application with a reasoned, written review and ranks the applications based on the panels' overall review.

IRF expert panels are not allowed to use Artificial Intelligence to evaluate applications.

5.2.1 External experts

Applicants can nominate external experts to evaluate their application. Additionally, they may request that certain external experts be not contacted, if they provide a valid reason for this request.

Note that these suggestions are not binding for the Expert Panel.

5.2.2 Evaluation of resubmitted applications

Resubmitted applications are not given priority over other applications, but evaluated by the Expert Panel alongside all other submitted applications. For resubmitted applications, it is important to address and specify the previous recommendations and comments provided by the Expert Panel. If these are not satisfactorily addressed, the Expert Panel reserves the right to refer to the previous reviews conducted by both the Expert Panel and external reviewers.

5.3 Funding decision

After the Expert panel has concluded its work, the chair of the panel meets with the Board of the IRF to present the panel's findings, the review process, and any issues that arose during the evaluation of applications. The Board makes decisions on funding allocations based on the panel's recommendations. The Board seeks additional advice beyond what the Expert panel provides if necessary. In addition to the professional assessment provided by the Expert panels, the IRF Board bases its deliberations on the general priorities of the Ministerial Committee on Science and Innovation, the fund's allocation policy approved by the Science and Innovation Council, and the fund's financial contributions.

Applications for Grants of Excellence and Startup Grants go through a two-step process. First, expert panels evaluate and rank applications. The Board then invites a representative of the top proposals for interviews and subsequently decides on the grants awarded. Only a few Grants of Excellence and Startup Grants are awarded each year, and their number can vary from year to year.

Once the allocation is finalized, all applicants receive a response with the final assessment of the Expert panel. Grant allocations are published on the Rannís website. The Board's decision on grant allocations from the Icelandic Research Fund is final. According to Article 4 of Law No. 3 from 2003, the Board's decisions on grant allocation or rejection are not subject to administrative appeal.

6 Grant: contracts, payments, and administration

6.1 Contracts

Contracts are made between the Project Leader (*PL*) and Rannís, on behalf of the Icelandic Research Fund. The PL must finalize the contract by April 1st of the year the grant is announced. If the contract is not finalized by that time, the grant will be forfeited. Grants are only paid into the bank accounts of Icelandic institutions or legal entities.

6.2 Necessary Permits and approvals

Contracts are not finalized until all necessary permits or opinions are obtained (e.g., from the National Bioethics Committee, Data Protection Authority, MAST, etc.).

The applicant must indicate in the application whether the research project includes elements that need special consideration regarding general ethical guidelines. It is necessary to explain what this entails and how these aspects will be addressed. If a permit application is still in process when the application is submitted, this must be noted in the application.

The applicant must comply with international rules and agreements where applicable, such as those concerning the handling of biological samples and the use of patents.

6.3 Distribution of Annual payments

- The first payment (80%) is made upon signing the contract.
- The second payment (20%) is made when the annual report/final report has been approved.

6.4 Reports

Annual and final reports must detail all major changes to the project and justify any alterations to the research plan.

The fund's staff may request additional information and explanations from grantees and consult the relevant Expert panel, if necessary. The final payment for each grant year (20%) is made upon approval of the annual or final report. If the report is not approved, the fund's Board may terminate the contract with the grant recipient and demand repayment of the grant funds. If the grant has not been used in accordance with the application, it must be returned.

Templates for annual and final reports can be found on the fund's website (see section 2).

Annual reports shall be submitted no later than February 1st following the end of the grant year, and the final report no later than February 15th just over a year after the end of the final grant year. Reports must be accompanied by a financial transaction list (not applicable to Doctoral Student Grants).

The Project Leader (PL) is responsible for the submission of annual and final reports.

7 Publication, open access, dissemination, and data management

7.1 Dissemination and publication of results

The results shall be published in a forum that complies with international requirements in the respective field. Grantees are expected to present the project and its results to the public as much as possible; target groups and media shall be defined in the application.

7.2 Open access to results

According to the Act on Public Support for Scientific Research no. 3/2003, research results funded by public funds shall be published through open access. Researchers who receive funding from the IRF must guarantee that their research findings will be made available by either publishing in open-access journals or open, searchable digital repositories along with publication in a traditional subscription journal. The final peer-reviewed manuscript shall be returned to the repository immediately after the article has been accepted for publication. If the journal requires a waiting period prior to open access, the article shall be made available for public access automatically when the waiting period expires.

Please consult regulations on publications in open access on the fund's website (see section 2). Repository for Icelandic universities is provided by Opin vísindi (opinvisindi.is).

The rules on open access currently apply to peer-reviewed articles published in scientific journals, not books or book chapters.

7.3 Acknowledging the grant

Grantees shall explicitly acknowledge the IRF grant and grant number in all publications based on the project's results. For example:

„This project/study/work/publication was supported by the Icelandic Research Fund grant no. xxxxxx.“

„Þetta verkefni/rannsókn/útgáfa er unnið með styrk nr. xxxxxx úr Rannsóknasjóði.“

7.4 Data Management

In the application, as appropriate, it shall be described how data resulting from the project or collected during the project will be stored and access provided, according to FAIR criteria (findable, accessible, inter-operable and re-usable). Data entails for instance tools, software or algorithms.

For funded projects, a data management plan shall be submitted, as appropriate, which complies with international standards (i.e. FAIR criteria), the Icelandic, and EU data protection rules (General Data Protection Regulation) and the code of conduct on data management. The Project Leader (PL) is responsible for submitting a data management plan to the IRF before April 1st of the grant year. The plan is sent to the fund's email address (see section 2) with the respective grant number.

8 General information

8.1 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).³ The role of the Research Fund is to support research and research-based postgraduate studies. To this end, the Fund provides grants to students pursuing research-based postgraduate studies and for defined research projects that promote scientific research in Iceland. Grants are awarded in accordance with the general priorities of the Science and Innovation Policy Council and on the basis of a professional evaluation of the quality of the research projects, the competence of the persons carrying out the research and the resources at their disposal to execute the project.

8.2 Board of the Research Fund

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation appoints a five-member Board for three years following nominations of the Science and Innovation Policy Council, thereof one member of the Council. The Minister appoints the chairman and vice-chairman of the Board. The names of the Board members are published on the website of the Icelandic Centre for Research (Rannís). The Board issues rules and guidelines for the IRF and makes funding decisions based on the evaluations by Expert Panels.

8.3 Ethical guidelines for administrator

Members of the IRF Board, members of Expert Panels, external experts, IRF staff and others that administratively handle applications to the IRF are bound by strict confidentiality. Applications, including all enclosed materials and review sheets, are confidential. 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 confidential information shall be made available in any format except for review purposes. After completion of the review, a copy of the application and review documents will be stored in the electronic registry of Rannís. IRF Expert Panel members understand and acknowledge that any disclosure or misappropriation 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 further disclosure or breach and for such other relief as the owner shall deem appropriate. Such ownership rights are in addition to the remedies otherwise available to registered owners or parties that derive rights from the owner.

8.4 Conflict of interest

The general grounds for conflict of interest listed in the Administrative Procedures Act (No. 37/1993) apply to the Icelandic Research Fund. Those who participate in the IRF's evaluation process are responsible for identifying circumstances that lead to conflict of interest.

Expert panel members, board members and external experts shall be considered in conflict if any of the following circumstances apply:

³ <https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2003003.html>

- A. Close friendship, family ties or in-laws with the applicant.
- B. Personal animosity towards the applicant.
- C. Professional competition or close collaboration with the applicant.
- D. Other reasons that could lead to a failure to maintain the utmost impartiality in the evaluation or other decisions regarding the allocation.

The effects of conflict of interest are as follows:

- If a board member, expert panel member or an external expert is a party to an application, the person concerned must resign from the board, expert panel or as an external expert.
- An expert panel member who has a conflict of interest for a specific application must leave the panel meeting when the application is discussed; this is recorded in the minutes. Further, he or she does not get access to the applications in the electronic evaluation system.
- If an external expert has a conflict of interest, he or she cannot review the relevant application.
- If a board member has a conflict of interest, he or she must withdraw from the allocation of the relevant grant year and a substitute is called in. Allocation from the IRF is a comprehensive process that ends with a single administrative decision. This means that if a board member considers himself or herself unable to discuss one application, the person concerned is considered ineligible to participate in the preparation, processing and resolution of the case as a whole and is therefore not qualified to discuss any other application.

If a board member or an expert panel member is an employee of an institution or legal entity applying to the fund, the closeness of the relationship with the employees involved in the application and/or the directors of the institution in question must be assessed. These relationships do not necessarily lead to a conflict of interest.

8.5 Misconduct

Should suspicion of research misconduct, fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misappropriation in connection with an application or a funded project arise during the application process, during the funding period, or after the funding period of the project, the relevant party's institution and the IRF Board will be notified, without exception.

Suspicion of research misconduct during the review phase will result in the withdrawal of an application from the review process. At the same time, the Project Leaders's (PL's) institution is given an opportunity to investigate. Should allegations of research misconduct be found baseless, the application will be reviewed following standard review procedures. If evidence of research misconduct is found, the application will be withdrawn without review, and the applicant's institute will be held responsible for taking appropriate actions.

The IRF Board can initiate an independent investigation into cases of research misconduct.

9 Guidelines for Expert Panels and External Experts

9.1 Guidelines for Expert Panels

The role of the IRF Expert Panels is to evaluate applications submitted to the IRF based on the scientific value of the projects, the applicants' qualifications to carry out the project, suitability of the research facilities, and the likelihood of the project resulting in measurable results and gains. The Expert Panels establish a ranking list based on the expert evaluations and finalize each application review with a written report.

9.1.1 Online review system

Each Expert Panel member is given access to the IRF's online rating system where all applications submitted to the panel and relevant accompanying documents and Expert Panel review sheets can be viewed. Expert Panel members must accept a confidentiality statement and declare possible conflict of interest before getting full access to the applications. Expert Panel members do not get access to grant applications where they have declared conflict of interest.

9.1.2 Review process

The applications received by the Expert Panel are divided amongst panel members. Each application is then assigned to three readers, but all panel members are encouraged to review all applications assigned to their respective Expert Panels. The first reader (editor) is responsible for finding external experts to assess the application, at least two experts for Project Grant and Startup Grant applications, and three experts for applications of Grants of Excellence. External experts shall be professionally active outside of Iceland. The selection of external experts is based on the relevant scientist's area of expertise and scientific merits according to professional websites and citation databases. The first reader must make sure that there is no conflict of interest between external experts and applicants. External experts must then confirm that there is no conflict of interest.

The external experts that agree to review an application are given access to a web portal with all necessary information regarding the assessment process. External review involves an in-depth reading of applications.

When external experts have submitted their evaluation and readers on the Expert Panel have drafted their reviews, the Expert Panel meets at the premises of Rannís to discuss all applications and deliberate on rankings.

The opinions of External experts are not binding for the expert panels but for reference only. Thus, the opinions of External experts do not determine the outcome of the panel's evaluation.

As to applications for Startup Grants, Postdoctoral Fellowships and Doctoral Student Grants, the expert panels note letters of recommendation from two referees who do not participate the application.

9.1.3 Artificial Intelligence

IRF expert panels must never apply Artificial Intelligence (AI) to evaluate applications. All other uses of AI must be ethical and responsible, and respect legal and research standards and requirements. Expert

panel members are advised to read the European Commission’s Living guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research.⁴

9.1.4 Expert Panel meetings

Before Expert Panel meetings

For each application three readers from the Expert Panel write an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the applications. The first reader (editor) drafts a panel evaluation based on the submitted external reviews, where appropriate, and the evaluations from the second and third readers.

At Expert Panel meetings

During the Expert Panel meetings, the editors present their respective applications, briefly introduce the background of the external experts, present the external experts’ reports, and finally offer their own assessment of the respective applications. The second and third reader then provide their comments and the whole panel discusses the review. Based on the panel’s discussion, the editor prepares a final conclusion, which should be constructive and written so that the applicants benefit from it. After discussing all applications, each Expert Panel establishes a ranking list. The grades given by the Expert Panel are explained in Table 7.

7	Outstanding Exceptionally strong application with negligible weaknesses
6	Excellent Very strong application with only minor weaknesses
5	Very good Strong application, generally well-designed Some weaknesses, but overall merits outweigh shortcomings
4	Good Reasonable quality, but with clear weaknesses Scientific contribution or novelty is moderate
3	Fair Some merits, but several significant weaknesses Limited impact and competitiveness
2	Weak Major weaknesses in design, feasibility, or impact Low scientific quality
1	Poor Very serious flaws

Table 7. Grading scale for Expert Panel and external experts.

After Expert Panel meetings

The chair of the Expert Panel confirms the final assessment of the Expert Panel in the online rating system of Rannís.

⁴ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2b6cf7e5-36ac-41cb-aab5-0d32050143dc_en?filename=ec_rtd_ai-guidelines.pdf

External reviews received after the Expert Panel meetings and before the final IRF Board meeting are discussed by the panel members online, and the final grade is confirmed or altered based on the outcome of those discussions.

9.1.5 Evaluation criteria

Grants of Excellence, Project Grants and Startup Grants:

1. Originality and impact
2. Scientific quality, feasibility and project management
3. Project leader, principal investigator and co-proposers

In addition, in Postdoctoral Fellowships, the career development of the applicant is considered; in Doctoral Student Grants, the supervisor is considered.

For the grading scale, see Table 7.

9.2 Guidelines for External Experts

9.2.1 General information

In the Expert Panels, applications are discussed, taking into consideration the opinions of external experts. Project Grant and Startup Grant applications are generally reviewed by two external experts. Grants of Excellence are evaluated by at least three external experts. No fee is paid for the work of external experts.

9.2.2 Conflict of interest

External experts are responsible for identifying circumstances which constitute conflicts of interest for them when it comes to reviewing IRF applications. External experts must confirm that there is no conflict of interest prior to being granted access to the application.

For more details on conflict of interest, see section 8.

9.2.3 Evaluation criteria

For the evaluation criteria and grading scale used by external experts, see section 9.1.5 and Table 7.