



Stjórnarráð Íslands
Heilbrigðisráðuneytið

NATIONAL HEALTH SCIENCES FUND

The Ministry of Health

Guidelines and rules for grant year 2026

Grants for research in the field of ageing





FOREWORD

The Handbook of the National Health Sciences Fund is intended to increase transparency in the allocation process. It applies to the 2026 grant year and provides applicants and Expert Panels with clear guidance on the process, from the announcement of the application deadline through to the award and administration of grants. The handbook contains the Fund's rules, the rights and obligations of grant recipients, and various useful information about the application process. The handbook is published in connection with the announced application deadline, and everyone involved in applications is encouraged to familiarize themselves with it.

ROLE OF THE National Health Sciences Fund

The National Health Sciences Fund, a research fund in health sciences, is a special fund under the Ministry of Health. The Fund's role is to promote research in health sciences, from basic science to public health and clinical research.

The National Health Sciences Fund awards grants in accordance with the Minister's priorities and on the basis of a professional assessment of research projects, the competence of the individuals conducting the research, and their facilities for carrying out the project.

The National Health Sciences Fund is a competitive fund, and the Minister has entrusted its administration to the Icelandic Centre for Research (Rannís).

BOARD OF THE National Health Sciences Fund

The Minister appoints five representatives to the Board of the National Health Sciences Fund for three-year terms. The Chair of the Board is appointed by the Minister without nomination, and in addition four representatives with expert knowledge of basic science, public health, and clinical research, three representatives nominated by the university community, and one representative without nomination.

BOARD PRIORITIES

The Board of the National Health Sciences Fund places emphasis on strengthening research in the field of ageing. In shaping the Fund's priorities, consideration is given, among other things, to the Minister's priorities and government policy.

TIMELINE

The application deadline for the National Health Sciences Fund is 1 October 2026, and it is announced with at least 6 weeks' notice.

1. RULES AND GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

1.1 Eligibility of applicants

Project Leaders (PL) and Principal Investigators (PI) applying for grants from the National Health Sciences Fund must have completed research-based studies at internationally recognized universities. It is a condition that the Project Leader holds a position at, or has facilities at, an Icelandic university or institution during the proposed grant period.

An individual may serve as Project Leader or Principal Investigator on only one application.

Members of the Fund's Expert Panel and Board may not be participants in an application to the Fund.

1.2 Grants for research in the field of ageing

The grants are intended for research groups working on ambitious research projects in the field of ageing.

Five one-year research grants will be awarded. The maximum amount per grant is ISK 15 million, plus up to ISK 5 million for shared operations and facilities. The total grant amount may therefore amount to a maximum of ISK 20 million.

1.3 Eligible costs

The Fund supports costs relating to salaries, operating costs, contracted services, and shared operations. The Fund does not support travel and/or conference costs, or the publication of scientific articles.

The Fund's specialists, on behalf of the Board, reserve the right to review individual cost items, including salaries, during contract negotiations.

A matching contribution is not required, but it is necessary to account for the total cost of the project.

1.3.1 Salaries

The Fund supports the salaries of scientists, graduate students, and research staff. Applications for salary support may only be made for individuals who hold a position at, or have facilities at, Icelandic institutions or legal entities.

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.

The Fund does not support: payment of salaries to individuals who are receiving full salary from other positions (including pension recipients); payment of overtime; payments for the purchase of teaching relief; or payments that would cause the individual's income to exceed the equivalent of a 100% full-time daytime position.

1.3.2 Operating costs

Applications may be made for costs relating to supplies necessary for the project, but not for items falling under shared operations and facilities, including general office equipment such as computers. All operating costs must be itemized and accounted for. Unexplained costs will not be approved.

1.3.3 Contracted services

This item covers costs for work not carried out by registered participants in the project, but which are necessary for its progress. The application must describe what the contracted service consists of, along with all associated costs.

As a general rule, the cost of contracted services shall not exceed 20% of the project's total cost.

A quote for contracted services must be available at the time the contract is signed.



1.3.4 Contribution for shared operations and facilities (Overhead)

An additional 25% is calculated on top of the awarded grant to fund shared operations and facilities. This refers to costs relating to office and research facilities, such as rent, heating, electricity, management of operational units, purchase of books and journals, and the purchase and operation of computer equipment.

The contribution for shared operations and facilities is not calculated on contracted services.

2. APPLICATION AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

2.1 Electronic application form

Only applications and supporting documents submitted through Rannís's electronic application system will be accepted. An application cannot be submitted unless all mandatory fields have been completed and all necessary supporting documents have been uploaded.

The application and supporting documents shall be in English.

2.2 Project description and bibliography

The project description shall be submitted using the Fund's template, which can be found in the Fund's electronic application system, and shall be submitted as a PDF file.

The project description is divided into the following sections, which may not be altered:

- Objectives of the project, research questions/hypotheses, feasibility, novelty, and impact.
- State of knowledge in the field.
- Research plan and deliverables (timeline and work plan, methods, milestones, current status of the project, etc.).
- Project management and collaboration.
- Data management and publication of results and data in open access.

The template uses 12 pt. Times/Times New Roman font, with 1.5 line spacing and 2.5 cm margins. These settings shall not be changed.

Before the project description is uploaded to the application system, the bibliography shall be removed and saved as a separate PDF file. There is no maximum length for the bibliography.

The project description may be a maximum of 12 pages. A cover page and an instructions page are added to the project description, so the application system allows a 14-page PDF file to be uploaded (excluding the reference list).

Applications that do not use the correct template for the project description will be dismissed from assessment. This may occur at any point during the assessment process.

2.3 Other supporting documents

2.3.1 Curriculum vitae (CV)

The CV shall be concise and no more than three pages in length. A link to a website listing publications may be included, such as ORCID. The CV shall include information on the applicant's current position, education and training, previous positions and honours, supervision of graduate students and postdoctoral researchers, and up to five articles or book chapters relevant to the project.

2.3.2 Required permits

The applicant shall state in the application whether the research project contains elements that require special consideration with respect to general ethical rules. It must be explained what this involves and how these elements will be addressed. The relevant permits or opinions must be in place (National Bioethics Committee, Data Protection Authority, MAST — the Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority, etc.). If a permit application is still being processed at the time the application is submitted, this shall be stated in the application.

Applicants shall comply with international rules and agreements where applicable, for example concerning the handling of biological samples and the use of patents.

A contract will not be finalized until all necessary permits are in place.



2.3.3 Collaboration statement

If the project is a collaborative project, a signed confirmation (Letter of Intent) shall accompany the application, specifying who the participants are and what their participation in the project involves. The collaboration statement shall be no longer than one page and is not a letter of support.

3. APPLICATION ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Applications must meet all eligibility conditions in order to receive professional assessment.

Professional assessment of an application is based solely on the information provided in the application and its supporting documents. No documents are accepted after the application deadline has passed.

3.1 Pre-screening of applications and dismissal

Applications are pre-screened by the Fund's administrators at Rannís. Incomplete applications, and applications that do not comply with the Fund's rules, are dismissed without further assessment, and the applicant is notified of this.

The main reasons an application may be dismissed are as follows (the list is not exhaustive):

- The correct template for the project description was not used.
- The project description template has been altered.
- The application is incomplete.
- The application and/or supporting documents are not in English.
- The Project Leader (PL) does not hold a position at the accounting institution of the application, i.e. an Icelandic research institution or legal entity, during the proposed grant period.
- The applicant is Project Leader (PL) or Principal Investigator (PI) on more than one application.
- The applicant has contacted the Expert Panel.
- Suspected misconduct.

3.2 Expert Panel of the National Health Sciences Fund

All valid applications are assessed by the Expert Panel. The Board of the Fund appoints individuals with extensive experience in health sciences research to the Fund's Expert Panel. In appointing the Expert Panel, consideration is given to professional breadth, to as even a gender balance as possible, and to ensuring that panel members work abroad.

Applicants may under no circumstances contact Expert Panel members during the assessment process. If an applicant contacts a Expert Panel member in connection with an application, that application will be withdrawn from the assessment process. Questions regarding individual Expert Panels and fields of expertise shall be directed to the administrators of the Fund at Rannís (hvsjodur@rannis.is).

Applications received by the Expert Panel are distributed among panel members, with three readers within the panel assigned to each application. All panel members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with all applications.

The Expert Panel concludes its assessment of each application with a reasoned, written review.

3.3 Decision on grant award

The Board of the National Health Sciences Fund makes decisions on grant awards based on the Expert Panel's assessments. In addition to the professional assessment provided by the Expert Panel, the Board shall base its deliberations on the Minister's policy and the funding allocated to the Fund. Once allocation decisions have been made, applicants receive a response letter with the Expert Panel's final assessment.

Grant awards are published on the website of the Ministry of Health and on the Rannís website.

Decisions of the Board on the award of grants from the National Health Sciences Fund are final at the administrative level. Pursuant to Article 4 of Act No. 3 of 2003, decisions of the Board on the award or refusal of grants are not subject to administrative appeal.



4. GRANT AWARD

4.2 Contracts and distribution of payments

Contracts are made between the Project Leader (PL) and Rannís, on behalf of the National Health Sciences Fund. The Project Leader shall have finalized the contract within two months of notification of the grant award. Grants are only paid into the bank accounts of Icelandic institutions or legal entities.

4.3 Distribution of annual payments

- First payment (80%) is paid upon signing of the contract
- Second payment (20%) is paid once the final report has been approved

4.4 Final report

The final report shall account for all major changes to the project, and any changes to the research plan shall be substantiated. The financial report shall account for costs incurred on the project, and a transaction list reflecting the use of the grant shall accompany the financial statement.

The Fund's staff may request further information and explanations from grant recipients and may consult with the relevant Expert Panel if necessary. The final payment (20%) is paid upon approval of the final report. If the report is not approved, the Fund's Board may terminate the contract with the grant recipient and call for repayment of the grant funds. If the grant has not been used in accordance with the application, it shall be returned.

A template for the final report can be found on the website of the Fund.

The Project Leader is responsible for submitting the final report and all information that must be included in it.

5. PUBLICATIONS, OPEN ACCESS, DISSEMINATION, AND DATA MANAGEMENT

5.1 Dissemination and publication of results

Project results shall be published in a venue consistent with international standards in the relevant field. Grant recipients are expected to present the project and its results to the public wherever possible, and this shall be described in the application.

5.2 Open access publication

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.

5.3 Acknowledgement of the grant in publications

Grant recipients shall acknowledge the National Health Sciences Fund and the project's grant number when publishing results. See the following example:

Þetta verkefni/rannsókn/útgáfa er unnið með styrk nr. xxxxxx úr Heilbrigðisvísindasjóði.

This project/study/work/publication was supported by the National Health Sciences Fund, grant no. xxxxxx.

5.4 Data management

The application shall state, as applicable, how data storage and access to data will be handled. An account shall be given of the storage of, and access to, tools, software, or algorithms that will be collected or created during the project, in accordance with the FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable, and re-usable).

5.5 Use of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence has become part of scientific work and research. All use of AI tools shall be ethical, responsible, and shall respect legal and scientific standards and requirements. The use of generative AI shall be transparent. Applicants are advised to familiarize themselves with the European Commission's guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research.

The National Health Sciences Fund does not use artificial intelligence in the assessment and administration of applications.

6. GUIDANCE FOR EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

The role of the National Health Sciences Fund's Expert Panel is to assess applications received by the Fund on the basis of the scientific merit of the projects, the competence and facilities of the applicants to carry out the work, and the likelihood that the project will produce measurable results and benefits. The Expert Panel concludes its assessment of each application with a written statement and assigns it a grade on the basis of the professional assessment.

6.1 Electronic assessment system

Expert Panel members are given access to the Fund's electronic assessment system. This contains all applications received by the Fund, supporting documents, and the Expert Panel's assessment form. In order to gain full access to the data, an Expert Panel member must first accept a declaration of confidentiality (CA) and flag Conflicts of Interest (Col) for any applications they are disqualified from handling. Expert Panel members are not given access to the supporting documents of applications for which they have declared Col.

6.2 Assessment process

Applications received by the Expert Panel are distributed among its members. Three Expert Panel members are assigned to each application, but all panel members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with all applications.

Once all applications have been assessed by the panel's readers, draft statements from the Expert Panel are prepared. The Expert Panel then meets.

Applicants are sent the Expert Panel's statement once the Fund's Board has decided on the year's grant allocations.

6.3 Expert Panel meetings

Before Expert Panel meetings

Three readers from the Expert Panel write a review of each application in the electronic assessment system. Taking into account the panel readers' reviews, the first reader prepares a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which they are responsible.

At Expert Panel meetings

Expert Panel members who have declared Col leave the meeting room while that application is being discussed, and this is recorded in the minutes by the Expert Panel administrator. At Expert Panel meetings, the first reader presents the application and their own statement. The other two readers then contribute their comments, and the Expert Panel discusses the assessment and finalizes the panel's final review. The review shall be constructive and framed so that the applicant derives as much benefit from it as possible.

Once the Expert Panel has discussed all applications, they grade the applications in accordance with the panel's overall assessment. The strength categories range from 1 to 7, where strength category 7 is intended for outstanding applications (Table 2).



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 2 . Grading scale for Expert Panel and external experts.