

## Terms of Reference

8<sup>th</sup> application round

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### **Terms of Reference (TOR) for evaluation of proposals for new Centers of Excellence in the 8<sup>th</sup> application round**

Ref. 24-224

The objective of the Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF) is to promote and stimulate outstanding research at the highest international level at the frontiers of all research fields. This is done through the prestigious Centers of Excellence (CoE) program. A center grant is large and flexible and runs for up to 10 years, with a first funding period of six years and a second funding period of four years.

Centers of Excellence grants are used for funding outstanding researchers in large groups who jointly pursue the answer to an intriguing, overarching, and ambitious research question. A Center of Excellence builds a creative research environment and strengthens the exchange of ideas across generations and research areas. However, centers may form partnerships with researchers at other institutions, either in Denmark or abroad.

Centers are expected to ponder some of the large unsolved questions and address the research questions that intrigue them the most. The philosophy is that new and somewhat unexpected knowledge that transcends existing knowledge barriers emerges when dedicated people with high scientific standards work together to explore problems that spark their passion. In other words, the foundation welcomes curiosity-driven research – or what might be described as exceptional researchers' "dream projects."

Calls for new centers are announced approximately every two years, and they involve a two-stage application process. In the first stage, prospective center leaders are invited to submit short outline proposals. These proposals are processed only by the foundation's board. In the second stage, applicants submit full proposals that are thoroughly scrutinized by three high-level, international experts in the field.

## Criteria

When assessing new proposals more emphasis is put on people, ideas and potential and less on milestones and deliverables. The same criteria are applied throughout the assessment and selection process:

- **The research idea:** The research idea is ambitious and original and has the potential for real scientific breakthroughs in the relevant research field(s).
- **The center leader:** The proposed center leader has a high standing in the international research community as well as managerial skills.
- **The team:** The center includes high-quality personnel in order to establish a creative and dynamic international research environment that will provide an inspirational training ground for young researchers.
- **The structure/organization:** The focus, structure, and size of the proposed center set the stage for scientific ventures that are not feasible within conventional funding from other sources.

## The proposals:

When invited to submit full proposals, applicants have been asked to give:

- A visionary presentation of no more than five pages expanding the overall research idea, including:
  - A description of its dimension of novelty and potential for groundbreaking results and an argument for its scientific or investigative relevance and expected impact
  - A strategy for addressing the challenges. How will the center be organized? Which competencies/capacities will be involved? How will a strong, creative, and dynamic research environment be established? With which institution(s) will it be affiliated? What are the qualifications of the proposed center leader (scientific as well as managerial skills)? Will specific initiatives be made to attract young and talented researchers? How do the applicants plan to attract international researchers? What sort of international collaboration is envisaged? How will the research activities relate to existing Danish research in this area?
- A description of the planned research program (not exceeding 10 pages, excluding necessary references)
- The CV of the proposed center leader, including a brief and concise outline of his or her professional career
- CVs for each of the participating senior researchers

**The reviews:**

Reviewers are not asked to grade or rank the applications but to deliver an assessment based on arguments and reflections. The reviews should consist of a 3- to 5-page report addressing the following four focal points corresponding to the assessment criteria listed above. The foundation offers reviewers an honorarium of DKK 3.000.

**1. The research**

Is the research idea ambitious and original? Does it possess scientific or investigative relevance? Does it have the potential for reaching real scientific breakthroughs and making an impact? Please indicate the level of risk associated with this proposal.

**2. The center leader**

Does the proposed center leader have a high standing in the international research community? Is the track record of the center leader characterized by ground-breaking research and has his/her achievements typically gone beyond the state of the art? If not, would you expect the center leader to obtain that status within the proposed 6-year period? Has the center leader demonstrated sound leadership in the training and advancement of young researchers? Is he/she well qualified for leading an initiative of this size?

**3. The team**

Does the center include high-quality personnel with the right competencies/capacities to ensure the establishment of a creative and dynamic international research environment? Is the center an attractive unit for recruiting and training students and young researchers from abroad as well as from Denmark?

**4. The structure**

Are the focus, structure, and size of the proposed center such that it sets the stage for scientific ventures? Do the host department and the institutions involved have the required scientific and technical expertise to support the group?

**Concluding remarks**

Please include some concluding remarks summing up the overall assessment. Please point out the three top qualities and the three weakest points of the proposal. A comparison of the standing between the proposed endeavor and world-leading research environments within this research area is also welcome.

**Conflict of interest**

In order to ensure that an assessment is not suspected of bias, a reviewer must not have a conflict of interest (such as close family relationships or friendships with any of the persons involved in the proposed center, joint projects or co-authorship within the past 5 years, etc.). Reviewers should be aware that, according to Danish legislation, they cannot remain anonymous in this process. Applicants will receive a copy of the reviews and will be asked to comment on them before the board of the foundation makes its final decision.