

For the attention of peer reviewers in  
the Danish National Research Foundation's  
12<sup>th</sup> application round for Centers of Excellence

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### **Guide for reviewers for evaluating proposals for new Centers of Excellence in the 12<sup>th</sup> application round**

The objective of the Danish National Research Foundation 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 program. A center grant is large and flexible and has a duration of up to 10 years, with a first funding period of six years and, if renewed, a grant can be extended for a second funding period of an additional four years.

Centers of Excellence grants are used to fund 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 and a half 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, invited applicants submit full proposals that are thoroughly scrutinized by three high-level international experts in the field.

## Criteria

When assessing new proposals, the board puts more emphasis 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, the needed leadership skills, as well as the time and capacity to undertake the task of running a Center of Excellence.
- **The team:** The center includes co-applicants with high-level scientific competences within their respective research field in order to establish a creative and dynamic international research environment that will also provide an inspirational training ground for young researchers.
- **The structure/organization:** The focus, structure, and size of the proposed center are such that the center sets 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 submit:

- 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 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)? Is the diversity factor in the core group well represented and if not what measures/plan will be implemented to address it in the lifetime of the center? Will specific initiatives be undertaken 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) including:
  - Information on the different sub-projects together with the active roles of the co-applicants and any new possible tenured staff positions.
  - A Gantt diagram or timeline illustrating the research program, its sub-projects and the people involved.
- 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 co-applicants

## **The reviews**

Reviewers are not asked to grade or rank the applications. The reviewers are asked to deliver an assessment based on arguments and reflections and are encouraged to be outspoken and explicit in their reviews of the applications. 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 4,000 DKK.

### **1. The research**

Is the research idea ambitious and original? Does it possess scientific 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 groundbreaking research and have 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 co-applicants who with their high-level scientific competencies within their respective research field, contribute substantially to the research and play an active and critical role in the success of the proposed endeavor? 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 they set 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.

### **Conflicts of interest**

If a reviewer may be suspected of bias, that person has an obligation to inform the secretariat of the foundation as soon as possible. Any potential conflict of interest must be addressed and handled in accordance with the [Foundation's Guidelines for Conflicts of Interest](#).

### **Confidence**

Please note that all forwarded material must be treated confidentially and subsequently destroyed. 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.

**Privacy Policy**

The foundation is responsible for the processing of personal data, including the data of the reviewers, in accordance with applicable rules, notably the EU General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679). Reviewers are encouraged to read the [Foundation's Privacy Policy](#).