

## Guide for peer advisors for assessing pre-proposals for new Centers of Excellence in the 13<sup>th</sup> application round

### Centers of Excellence

The objective of the Danish National Research Foundation is to promote and stimulate excellent 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 excellent 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 can be established within all scientific areas, including interdisciplinary approaches, are expected to engage in original research questions and to address the challenges 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 second year, and they involve a two-stage application process. In the first stage, prospective center leaders are invited to submit short pre-proposals allowing the foundation to decide on which pre-proposals will be rejected or invited for submission of full proposals. Decisions on pre-proposals are made solely by the board of the foundation but with prior involvement of a limited number of peer advisors to assist and focus on the identification of pre-proposals with strong breakthrough potential. In the second stage, invited applicants submit full proposals that are thoroughly scrutinized by three high-level international experts in the field. More information about the assessment and selection of applications can be found here: [www.dg.dk](http://www.dg.dk).

### The role of peer advisors

As a new initiative in the 13<sup>th</sup> CoE application round, peer advisors will be engaged to enhance the board's understanding of the ambition, originality and breakthrough po-

tential in pre-proposals across all scientific areas, including those outside board members' immediate expertise.

The involvement of peer advisors is designed to enrich the board's evaluation process as an additional source of scientific understanding, and peer advisors do not participate in the board's decision-making. Only the board concludes and decides on which pre-proposals will be rejected or invited for submission of full proposals. Peer advisors will be appointed based on their academic profile, in order to bring in scientific competencies that are complementary to the areas of expertise within the board. Peer advisors will be outstanding scientists with considerable evaluation experience.

Peer advisors will read all pre-proposals within their respective main scientific areas, broken down to three main areas: Social Sciences and Humanities, Physical Sciences and Engineering, and Life Sciences, mirroring the categorization employed by the European Research Council (ERC). It is the intention that peer advisors will be recruited from relevant previous ERC Advanced Grant panels.

Peer advisors are not requested to perform a traditional, full review of pre-proposals with a written report. Peer advisors are not asked to grade or rank pre-proposals. Instead, **peer advisors are requested to consider specifically the ambition, originality and breakthrough potential of each pre-proposal**. During the board meeting on November 30 – December 1, 2026, peer advisors will be present during the board's initial deliberations concerning pre-proposals within the main scientific area of the peer advisor. Peer advisors will be invited to answer questions and offer reflections when requested by the board in order to share their considerations concerning the breakthrough potential.

The foundation offers peer advisors an honorarium of 50 euros for each pre-proposal read. Peer advisors must be available for one-day participation in the DNRF board meeting in Copenhagen on either November 30 or December 1, 2026. The specific date for participation will be communicated to peer advisors well in advance, and the foundation will arrange and cover transportation and potential accommodation.

### **The pre-proposals**

The scientific part of the pre-proposals that the peer advisors are requested to consider includes:

An argument for supporting the proposed endeavor (max. 1,500 characters incl. spaces)

For instance, the argument could address the following questions:

- How will it redefine the research in its respective field and lead to potential breakthroughs?
- What kind of new insights and results may it produce?
- Why should this particular proposed team pursue this research?

A presentation of the research idea (max. 10,000 characters incl. spaces)

For instance, the presentation could address the following questions:

- A description of how the proposed *research idea* compares to "state of the art" within the given field, including its dimension of novelty and potential for groundbreaking results and an argument for its scientific relevance.
- A *strategy* for addressing the challenges. How will the center be organized? Which competencies/capacities will be involved? How will a creative and dynamic research environment be established? Which methodologies and approaches will be employed?

A description of the full pre-proposal as well as the board's assessment criteria can be found in the Guide for Applicants for new Centers of Excellence in the 13<sup>th</sup> application round at [www.dg.dk](http://www.dg.dk).

**Conflicts of interest**

If a peer advisor 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 material must be treated confidentially and subsequently destroyed. Peer advisors should be aware that, according to Danish legislation, they cannot remain anonymous in this process. The name of the peer advisors will be advertised on the website of the foundation.

**Privacy Policy**

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