

Guide for peer reviewers for evaluating full proposals for new Centers of Excellence in the 13th 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 input from 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.

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 fields and strong commitment to the center, in order to establish a creative and dynamic international research environment that will also provide an inspirational training ground for early-career 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 one-page generalist summary (maximum: 2,400 characters incl. spaces)

The summary must outline the center's vision, the co-applicants involved, organization, the amount applied for from the DNRF, and a description of the institutional environment and geographical location.

A visionary presentation (max. 12,000 characters incl. spaces) 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 core group adequately diverse and if not what measures will be implemented to address it during the lifetime of the center? Which specific initiatives will be undertaken to attract and develop 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 (max. 24,000 characters incl. spaces, excl. necessary references) including:

- A description of how the proposed center leader and co-applicants participate in the center's leadership structure, including the added value of their collaboration and how it supports the center's overall goals and success.
- Information on the different sub-projects together with the active roles of the proposed center leader and the co-applicants.
- A Gantt diagram or timeline illustrating the research program, its sub-projects and the people involved.

Curriculum vitae of the proposed center leader (max. 7,200 characters incl. spaces)

Curriculum vitae for each of the participating core members (max. 4,800 characters incl. spaces per CV)

A detailed budget for a six-year period covering the applied funding from the DNRF

Other funding

Declaration of the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI)

A letter of support from the host institution

A letter of declaration signed by the proposed center leader

The peer reviews

Peer reviewers are not asked to grade or rank the applications. The peer reviewers are asked to deliver an assessment based on arguments and reflections and are encouraged to be outspoken and explicit in their peer 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 peer reviewers an honorarium of 535 euro.

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 proposed 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 proposed center leader to obtain that status within the proposed 6-year period? Has the proposed center leader demonstrated sound leadership in the training and advancement of young researchers? Is the proposed center leader 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

The review must include concluding remarks, summing up the overall assessment and further 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 peer 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 material must be treated confidentially and subsequently destroyed. Peer 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 peer reviewers, in accordance with applicable rules, notably the EU General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679). Peer reviewers are encouraged to read the [Foundation's Privacy Policy](#).