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Description**:**	A description of the evaluation process of state research funding applications as well as the principles, criteria, and guidelines for the evaluator of applications. *(unofficial translation)*

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1 EVALUATION PROCESS OF STATE RESEARCH FUNDING APPLICATIONS IN THE EASTERN FINLAND COLLABORATIVE AREA

Regional research committee for university-level health research in the Eastern Finland collaborative area decides on the allocation of state research funding to research projects based on funding applications. Applications are evaluated and scored by external evaluators.

External evaluators have extensive expertise in health science research. Some of the sections of the application to be evaluated are scored at the Science Service Centre of the wellbeing services county of North Savo before the assessment begins (assessment criteria 3.5 and 4.1).

Regional research committee for university-level health research in the Eastern Finland collaborative area annually decides on the principles of the funding application and evaluation, arrangements, and procedure before the next funding application period in accordance with the policies of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The Science Service Centre prepares a summary of the evaluated applications and makes a proposal on the distribution of funding to the research committee meeting. After the evaluation, the research committee makes funding decisions in accordance with the agreed principles.

1.1 Etchics

According to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity the basic principles of good scientific practice are reliability, honesty, and accountability. The evaluation of research projects is based on the European Code of Research Ethics, the guidelines of the Research Ethics Advisory Board, national recommendations, and good practices in the evaluation of scientific research, for example “Good practice in researcher evaluation. Recommendation for the responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland” (www.avointiede.fi) and “The Finnish code of conduct for research integrity and procedures for handling alleged violations of research integrity in Finland 2023”

1.2 Confidentiality

The Act on the Openness of Government Activities (21.5.1999/621) is applied in the evaluation process of research projects. Funding application documents are processed and stored confidentially. Evaluators may not disclose to third parties’ information and assessments concerning application documents, use the information contained in documents for their own benefit or benefit/harm to others, or disclose to third parties whose application is the subject of the assessment. If the evaluator is asked for information related to the assessment documents and/or applicants, the questioner should be directed to contact the Science Service Centre of

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the wellbeing services county of North Savo. Once the assessment process is over, any documents and stored files printed by the evaluator must be disposed of appropriately.

The assessment documents are otherwise confidential, but applicants have the right to see the evaluation documents of their own application after the funding decision. Applicants have the right to know the names of all evaluators. The applicant has the right to know the names of the evaluators who assessed his or her application. Applicants have the right to appeal against the funding decision. Applicants will receive a summary of the assessment scores and written feedback upon request.

1.3 Disqualification

The principles of disqualification of the Administrative Procedure Act (6.6.2003/434) and the Academy of Finland are applied in disqualification issues related to the assessment. If the evaluator finds or suspects that he or she is disqualified, he or she cannot carry out the assessment. The evaluator must notify the Science Service Centre of the wellbeing services county of North Savo as soon as possible. The Science Service Centre forwards the assessment material to another evaluator.

An evaluator is disqualified if, for example:

- he or she benefits from the acceptance/rejection of the applicant's application, or the acceptance/rejection will do him or her harm
- works in close cooperation with the applicant (e.g. publication collaboration, direct supervisory or subordinate position, acting as the applicant's supervisor during the last three years, being part of the research group of the application under evaluation, or participating in the publication or application of the results),
- he or she applies for the same funding as the applicant,
- he or she is a close relative of the applicant (1) a married or cohabiting partner, child, grandchild, sibling, parent, grandparent or other close person (e.g. fiancée or close friend) and their married or cohabiting partners 2) the parent's sibling or his/her spouse or cohabiting partner, sibling's child, the person's ex-spouse (married or cohabiting) 3) the child, grandchild, sibling, parent, grandparent or sibling of the spouse or his/her cohabiting partner or his/her cohabiting partner 4) a half-family comparable to the above;

In addition, the evaluator must declare himself or herself disqualified if his/her impartiality might otherwise be jeopardized or if he/she feels a conflict of interest in the matter. The evaluator must notify the Science Service Centre of the wellbeing services county of North Savo as soon

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as possible. The Science Service Centre forwards the assessment material to another evaluator.

2 OBJECTIVES AND FOCUS AREAS OF UNIVERSITY-LEVEL HEALTH RESEARCH

Research projects applying for state research funding must be aligned with the focus areas and objectives of university-level health research, which are defined by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the research committees of the collaborative regions.

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The aim of the study is:

1) to promote the health and well-being of the population through high-quality and effective health research carried out in the health care service system;
2) to promote the effectiveness and quality of healthcare and patient safety as a part of it;
3) to produce new knowledge on health, health care and the service system of social and health care and ensure its dissemination and utilization in health care and elsewhere in society.
4) to support the career path of a clinical researcher.

The focus areas of university-level health research in 2024-2027 are:

1) **Clinical and translational research**
   This focus area would emphasize clinical and translational research of major public health problems and disease prevention, birth mechanisms, diagnostics, treatment, and rehabilitation. The research would use a controlled, randomized parallel-group research design. If this was not possible, other research designs could also be used. Multidisciplinary is typical for translational medicine. It works bidirectionally, promoting the utilization of basic research data in clinical research and, on the other hand, the utilization of patient samples in the investigation of disease mechanisms and treatment targets.

2) **Making research methods that utilize large data files available to healthcare;**
   Research methods using large data sets would be emphasized in this focus area. Research projects using them can, for example, apply new digital methods when utilizing various existing data, such as patient record data from clinical data pools or national registers, artificial intelligence methods or biobank data.

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The Act on the Secondary Use of Health and Social Data (552/2019) came into effect in 2019. The aim of the Act on the Secondary Use of Health and Social Data is to enable the efficient and secure processing of personal data stored in social and health care activities and for social, health, guidance, research, and statistical purposes, and to combine them with the personal data of the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, Digital and Population Data Service Agency, Statistics Finland, and the Finnish Centre for Pensions. The Act also aims to secure the protection of individual´s confidentiality as well as rights and freedoms when processing personal data. The secondary use of social and health data means that client and register data generated in social and health care activities are used for a purpose other than the primary purpose for which they were originally saved. The secondary use provided for in the Act on the Secondary Use of Health and Social Data is for example scientific research. The starting point with the Act on the Secondary Use of Health and Social Data has been that the duplication of administrative work in the licensing process could be eliminated and that the use of health and social data for research and development would become easier and more efficient. According to the Government Programme, the aim is to solve the challenges of the Act on the Secondary Use of Health and Social Data when using health and social data.

The objectives of the Biobank Act (668/2012) are to support research that utilizes human biological samples, to promote openness in the use of these samples and to secure the protection of privacy and self-determination when processing these samples. In spring 2023, the Biobank Act was updated to comply with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The changes took effect on the 1st January 2024.
Research projects in this priority area should take a new and innovative approach and have a clear objective to improve and develop disease prevention, diagnostics, effectiveness of treatment, rehabilitation, or the health care service system. For example, data from electronic reporting systems that concern safety incidents of client and patient safety in the health and social care sector could be used for the research.

3) Research on the effectiveness of health care and the service system, including quality and client and patient safety

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The third focus area would emphasize on research of the effectiveness of the health care and service system and as a part of that, research of the quality as well as client and patient safety.

Research of the effectiveness focuses on the effectiveness of existing and new treatments and services, treatment, and service policies, working methods and preventive interventions.

In addition to the effectiveness of individual interventions, the focus area would also include research on the effectiveness of service chains and service packages and of the service system or its components, as well as research on cost effectiveness. Research on the effectiveness of the service system is an important part of this focus area. The reform of the service system in social welfare and health care will require research on the service system in the coming years. Research data received from the service system of social welfare and health care also enables the development of the service system. Research has fundamental importance also for the quality of health care. Research produces innovations that benefit service users and develops professional skills of staff.

Research on client and patient safety is interdisciplinary and between organisations in particular, which also promotes the cooperation between primary health care and specialized health care, as well as the cooperation between social services and health care. Problems related to client and patient safety often arise at the interfaces between organizations, in situations where interruptions in the flow of information lead to dangerous situations. Also research on the effectiveness of safety measures is needed, as well as research on improving safety culture. Research data on adapting safety skills and working life skills can be found through training. In addition, national indicators, and the comparative data they provide are an important research topic.

4) Research supporting the development of a service system that reduces the inequalities of health and wellbeing

The fourth focus area would emphasize on vertical and horizontal integration of the health and social services system, operational performance and effectiveness, service quality, changes in operating practices and research focusing on competence management. The focus area would also cover effectiveness research, which emphasizes on the promotion of health and functional capacity, population counselling and the reduction of health inequalities, including clinical-epidemiological follow-up studies of primary health care

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population cohorts. In addition, the focus area would include research emphasizing on patient and client rights, the availability and use of services, and patient and client orientation. The purpose of the focus area would be to emphasize research that promotes to reducing inequalities in health and wellbeing. This kind of research is essential to support the reform and continuous development of the health and social services system. Research within the focus area may also require close cooperation with social welfare.

3 EVALUATION OF FUNDING APPLICATIONS

3.1 Practical implementation of the evaluation

The evaluation focuses on the general significance and impact of the research project in terms of health promotion and treatment of diseases, the clinical and health scientific significance of the research project, the research plan and scientific expertise. In addition, the research project is given an overall assessment.

At the Science Service Centre of the wellbeing services county of North Savo, some of the points to be assessed are scored based on the information provided in the application form before the assessment begins (assessment criteria 3.5 and 4.1). The evaluators evaluate the applications numerically using scales 0–5 and 0–3 (Tables 1 and 2), unless otherwise stated in the guidelines for the assessment criteria. The highest possible score is 37 points.

Applicants will be provided with a summary of the assessment scores and written evaluations provided by the evaluators.

Table 1: Rating scale from 0 to 5.

Points	Description	Explanation
0	Very poor	Very few strengths and a lot of major weaknesses
1	Poor	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
2	Satisfactory	Some strengths, but also some mediocre weaknesses
3	Good	Strong, but at least one mediocre weakness
4	Very good	Strong, but with some minor weaknesses
5	Excellent	Very strong, only some insignificant weaknesses

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Table 2: Rating scale 0-3.

Points	Description	Explanation
0	Poor	Few strengths and a lot of major weaknesses
1	Satisfactory	Some strengths, but also some mediocre weaknesses
2	Good	Strong, but at least one mediocre weakness
3	Excellent	Very strong, only some insignificant weaknesses

Minor weakness: an easily demonstrable weakness that has no significant impact on the relevance/viability/performance/impact of the research project.

Mediocre weakness: a weakness that limits / reduces the relevance / viability / effectiveness / impact of a research project.

High weakness: a weakness that has a significant impact on the relevance/viability/performance/impact of the research project.

Table 3: Assessment criteria and scoring

Assessment criteria	Scoring
1 General relevance of the research project for health promotion and disease treatment	0-5
2 Clinical and health science significance of the research project	0-3
3 Research plan 3.1 Innovativeness of the research project (0-3) 3.2 Quality of research methods and data (0–3) 3.3 Viability of the research project and realism of the financing plan (0-3) 3.4 Research group, research environment and research cooperation (0-3)	0-15

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3.5 Extent of the research project (0-3)	
4 Scientific expertise 4.1. Qualifications of the applicant (0-5) 4.2. Previous research evidence of the applicant (0-5)	0-10
5 Distribution to emphasis areas of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (0–4)	0-4
6 Overall assessment of the research project	Meritorious / Acceptable / Disqualified

The applicant submits the state research funding application in the “eTutkija”- system of the wellbeing services county of North Savo. The state research funding application form, research plan and list of publications must be attached to the application. A good research plan follows the principles of scientific writing. The plan proceeds logically, and the justifications, objectives and questions are clearly presented. The plan includes scientific reflection. The maximum length of the research plan is five (5) pages, excluding the separate cover page and bibliography. When structuring the plan, the applicant may follow the guidelines used by the Academy of Finland, where applicable:

http://www.aka.fi/tutkimussuunnitelma/ When structuring the list of publications, it is recommended to follow the guidelines used by the Academy of Finland, where applicable:

http://aka.fi/julkaisuluettelo

The assessment is carried out electronically in the “eTutkija”- system.

3.2 Evaluation criteria

3.2.1 The General Relevance of the Research Project for health promotion and disease treatment (0-5 points)

- How does research contribute to solving current problems in health promotion and/or disease management?
- How does the research project align with the focus areas 1–3 of university-level health research defined by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and regional university-level research committees?

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- How does the research project promote university-level health research in the healthcare service system?
- How does the research project promote the quality of healthcare and patient safety?
- What kind of new information does the research project produce and how does the research project ensure the dissemination and utilization of new knowledge in health care and elsewhere in society?
- What is the significance and benefit of the research project for the Eastern Finland collaborative area?

3.2.2 Clinical and health science significance of the research project (0-3 points)

- What is the clinical and health science significance of the research project?
- Does the project assess the impact of the intervention, research and/or results and from what perspectives?
- Do the results change our understanding of the underlying mechanisms of diseases?
- Will the results change current research and treatment practices?

3.2.3 Research plan (total 0-15 points)

3.2.3.1. Innovativeness of the research project (0-3 points)

- Is the research project innovative?
- Can research produce new knowledge, methods, new technology or new practices for end users?
- Is the research project a so-called breakthrough research, which also includes risks; does research have the potential to produce particularly significant results?
- Are the research results applicable and what are the possibilities of exploiting them?

3.2.3.2. Quality of research methods and data (0-3 points)

- Are the research methods scientifically reliable, of high international quality and the best possible for the research in question?
- Is the research data representative?

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- How have the statistical aspects of the survey been considered?
- Are the methods sufficiently accurate and reproducible?
- Can clinically and statistically significant results be achieved with the planned sample size?

3.2.3.3. Viability of the research project and realism of the financing plan (0-3 points)

- Are the research plan, objectives and hypotheses clear and realistic?
- Does the applicant identify potential problem areas in scientific research and have alternative approaches/implementation methods been considered/described?
- Are risks prepared for?
- Is the financial plan realistic, oversized, or undersized?
- Are the management, resources, manpower and estimated schedule of the research project appropriate and realistic?

The funding plan for a research project application must include all costs of the project, including salaries of research personnel, equipment and material purchases, outsourced services, and other expenses such as travel. The salaries of researchers and auxiliary staff are based at most on the job-specific salary of the employee's own post or position, in addition to which work experience bonuses (3–8%), social security expenses, holiday bonuses and compensations (approximately 40%) must be considered in the salary costs. The general administrative infrastructure costs of an organization’s research activities may not exceed 25%.

3.2.3.4. Research group, environment, and cooperation (0-3 points)

- Do the members of the research group bring complementary expertise to the project?
- Does the research environment, including appropriate infrastructure, support the research project and the achievement of its objectives?
- Does the research provide researcher training?
- If the research project is interdisciplinary/interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary, what is the added value?
- Does the research include researcher exchange / utilisation of researcher networks?

3.2.3.5. Extent of the research project (0-3 points)

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The scope of a research project is described by the level at which the research project is collaborated. The criterion is not used in the evaluation of doctoral research projects.

International cooperation = 3 points

- The research group and/or partners include operators outside Finland. The members and partners of the group have a significant impact on the implementation of the research project.

National cooperation = 2 points

- The research group and/or partners include operators from at least two organizations in Finland, e.g. a healthcare organization and a company or two healthcare organizations. The members and partners of the group have a significant impact on the implementation of the research project.

Local cooperation = 1 point

- The research group and/or partners include operators from at least two different organizations in the same locality. The members and partners of the group have a significant impact on the implementation of the research project.

No collaboration outside your own organization = 0 points

- The research group consists of operators from its own unit or organization.

3.2.4 Scientific expertise (0-10 points in total)

3.2.4.1. Qualifications of the applicant (0-5 points)

Research projects:

The assessment of the qualifications of the person in charge of the research project considers the number and quality of scientific publications related to the specific research topic during the three (3) calendar years preceding the application, the number of doctoral thesis supervision and the total amount of other research funding received during the last three (3) calendar years. **N.B. previously received state research funding is not included in the total amount of research funding.** The assessment is based on the information provided in the CV, which can be found in the application form. The qualifications of the person in charge of the research project are scored at the Science Service Centre.

- Supervision of doctoral thesis (Science Service Centre)
  - Those currently under supervision: ≥ 5 units = 0.5 points; ≥ 1 unit = 0.25 points

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- Doctoral thesis's supervised during the last three (3) years: ≥ 3 units = 0.5 points; ≥ 1 unit = 0.25 points

- Peer-reviewed original research articles (Science Service Centre) during the last three (3) calendar years preceding the application: ≥ 20 units = 0.5 points
- Hirsch index: ≥ 30 = 0.5 points
- IF points: ≥ 20 = 1 point; ≥ 5 = 0.5 points

In the CV, the applicant announces five (5) his/her own publications related to a specific research area during the three (3) calendar years preceding the application. The applicant reports the Hirsch index and the journal's IF score according to the latest Impact Factor value in the Journal of Citation Report database, applied for during the state research funding application period 7.1.-4.2.2025. The assessment considers the combined IF score of the published publications.

- Publication Forum (JUFO) classification:
  - 12−15 JUFO points = 1 point
  - 6−11 JUFO points = 0.5 points

The Publication Forum (www.julkaisufoorumi.fi) classification (JUFO) has three levels: 1 = basic level; 2 = conductive level; 3 = highest level. The JUFO categories can be searched on the Publication Forum website (www.tsv.fi/julkaisufoorumi/haku.php), and the latest JUFO category from the state research funding application period 7.1.-4.2.2025 will be entered in the application. The applicant indicates in the CV five (5) publications related to a specific research area during the three (3) calendar years preceding the application, each of which may belong to level 1–3 according to the current year's Publication Forum classification.

The assessment takes into account the combined JUFO score of the published publications.

In the CV, the applicant must indicate the total amount of research funding (€) he/she has received during the three (3) calendar years preceding the application period for all research projects in which he/she has worked as the principal researcher. **N.B. previously received state research funding is not included in the total amount of research funding!**

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- Total research funding received during the three (3) calendar years preceding the application period (Science Service Centre): ≥ 200 000 € = 1 point; ≥ €50,000 = 0.5 points

Doctoral thesis research projects:

The qualifications of doctoral researchers are scored at the Science Service Centre based on the information provided in the doctoral thesis supervisor's statement.

- Progress of postgraduate studies (0−1)
  - Less than 20% of credits completed, e.g. ≤ 8/40 credits = 0 points
  - 20-60% of credits completed e.g. 9-24/40 credits = 0.5 points
  - More than 60% of credits completed, e.g. ≥ 25/40 credits = 1 point

- Publications (0−3)
  - Less than or at least 25% publications or monograph completed = 0 points
  - 50 % of one publication or monograph completed = 1 point
  - 75% of two publications or monographs completed = 1.5 points
  - Over 75% of three publications or monographs completed = 2 points
  - Partial publications of non-doctoral thesis = 1 point

- Research funding received by the doctoral researcher (the researcher's own, not the research group's). State research funding previously received is not reported.) (0−1)
  - 0 € = 0 points
  - 1 – 2 500 € = 0,25 points
  - 2 500 – 10 000 € = 0,5 points
  - over 10 000 € = 1 point

3.2.5 Previous research evidence of the person in charge of the research project (0-5 points)

Research projects

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The applicant prepares a brief summary of his/her previous research evidence supporting this research project in question. This should be from the last three (3) years (see CV in the application form). Research evidence includes, for example, significant research results and their usability and utilization, new methods in the treatment of diseases, diagnostics and health promotion, and current care recommendations. The criterion is not used in the evaluation of doctoral research projects.

3.2.6 Distribution into focus areas defined by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (0–4 points)

The evaluators score the distribution of applications to the focus areas of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health on the basis of the information provided in the applications (see focus areas on pages 5–6).

- Focus area 1
  - if the study focuses on this area = 1 point
- Focus area 2
  - if the study focuses on this area = 1 point
- Focus area 3
  - if the study focuses on this area = 1 point
- Focus area 4
  - if the study focuses on this area = 1 point

3.2.7 Overall assessment of the research project

Is the research project highly meritorious/acceptable/rejectable? *(tick the box)*

The reasons for the overall assessment or rejection of the application shall be given in writing. The justifications will be used in the meeting of the regional university-level health research committee when making funding decisions.

The justifications can describe the weaknesses and strengths of the research project. If the evaluator gives a rejected as an overall assessment, the reason for the rejection must be sufficiently strong and the reasons must be described in detail. For example, an application may be rejected if the research project does not implement good scientific practice, the research project does not benefit the collaborative area of Eastern Finland, or it does not align with the objectives and focus areas defined by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and regional university-level health research committees.

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