

GUIDE TO SECTOR COUNSELLORS RESEARCH APPLICATION ROUND 2021, WINDOW 2



Introduction

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has provided grants for development research activities as part of Denmark's international development cooperation for decades. In 2017 a new window was introduced for research with partners in growth and transition countries involved in the Danish Strategic Sector Cooperation Facility.

Research project funding is available for Danish research institutions with partners in selected growth and transition countries within the thematic focus areas of the Strategic Sector Cooperation (SSC) agreements in these countries, determined in collaboration with the sector counsellors at the embassies. The themes in each country (associated with the SSC projects) are announced in the Calls as part of the annual application round.

The application round consists of two phases. Phase 1 is the prequalification phase in which a reduced number of applicants are shortlisted based on a research project idea and invited to Phase 2, a full research project proposal phase. The expected duration of the granted research projects is from 18 to 36 months with a maximum grant of 5 million DKK for each project.

While the MFA (Evaluation, Learning & Quality, ELK) is responsible for the strategic and political aspects of the research cooperation, the Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC) administers the application rounds and grants to research collaboration projects. The Consultative Research Committee for Development Research (FFU) is tasked with assisting the MFA by providing professional and scientific advice in relation to research applications and projects. In the assessment of applications, three overall criteria are used by the FFU: relevance, scientific quality, and the potential effect of the research. Embassies are involved in the assessment of relevance during Phase 1 and international peer reviewers are involved in the assessment of the scientific quality during Phase 2.

A new Call for 2021 has now been announced; see this on [DFC's webpage](#).

Objective of the research cooperation

The research projects are considered an important element in the Danish response to demand from the growth and transition countries for cooperation within areas where Denmark has internationally recognised knowledge and experience. The research partnerships should therefore focus within areas where this strategic interest for Denmark and the partner country have been identified and thereby strengthen the bilateral collaboration within this area. The overall objective is to generate new knowledge relevant to the needs of the growth and transition countries and contribute to strengthening research capacity in these countries.

Roles and responsibilities of sector counsellors in 2021

a. General communication with applicants

In the application process for these competitive funds, it is essential that the principles of good public administration are respected in accordance with Danish legislation (Forvaltningsloven / Vejledning om Effektiv Tilskudsforvaltning). Sector counsellors may be contacted by applicants for advice and information from the initial stages of preparing the application and throughout the application round. The overall principle in this contact with applicants is to ensure to *treat all applicants equally*, provide the same level of service, information and advice to all (without payment).

b. Involvement in Phase 1 – relevance assessment

The sector counsellors will be directly involved in the assessment of the applications in Phase 1. As sector counsellors are MFA employees and thereby part of the MFA as granting authority, it is important to avoid any possible conflicts of interest in the involvement and communication with applicants.

In Phase 1, the applications will be assessed by sector counsellors with respect to the **relevance** of the research project proposed (project idea). Relevance is in the Call defined as:

- *The focus of the project is well-defined with respect to the announced research theme in the chosen partner country;*
- *The project contributes to the overall objectives of the Danish strategic sector cooperation in the country;*
- *Preferably, the project includes public and private sector partners.*

In March 2021 the sector counsellors will be given access to the Phase 1 applications, receive instructions and a review form to be filled in for each application for research in the specific growth and transition country. In the assessment, the sector counsellors must *strictly adhere to the criteria in the Call*.

It is the responsibility of the sector counsellors to consult the relevant Danish authority during the assessment of relevance of the proposed project. The reviews will be used by the FFU in the further assessment at a meeting in April 2021 and for the final short-listing by the MFA (ELK).

In May the sector counsellors will be informed about which applicants have been invited to prepare a full research project proposal – a Phase 2 application.

c. Involvement in Phase 2 and in granted projects

The deadline for the Phase 2 applications is in August. The sector counsellors will not be involved in the assessment of the phase 2 applications, but again, it is important to *strike a balance* in the communication with the short-listed applicants. On the one hand, the contact to applicants is important to facilitate the link to the SSC from the onset of the research projects. On the other hand, the sector counsellors must not have a direct influence on the content of applications. Thus, it is necessary to keep advice at a general level concerning the themes and SSC projects.

By the end of 2021 the final decision will be made on which research projects are funded, and this decision will be endorsed by Innovation Fund Denmark. The sector counsellors will be informed of the approved research projects. When the research projects have been granted, the Danida Fellowship Centre will be responsible for the grant administration and contact to the project holders, including monitoring of project implementation in collaboration with ELK and the FFU. It is expected that the granted research projects will link directly with sector counsellors, e.g. through a project advisory committee, and that sector counsellors are invited to relevant project events.

For more information on Calls for research applications and on-going projects, please consult [DFC's webpage](#) or contact the DFC Research Management Team at research@dfcentre.dk.