Instructions for SAFER2028 call for 2027 (14.8.-9.10.2026)

The SAFER2028 call for proposals has been officially opened with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (MEAE) letter on 14.8.2026. **The call remains open until 9.10. at 16.15.**

The objectives and organisation of the SAFER2028 programme and this call are described in the SAFER2028 Framework Plan and the Update to the Framework plan, by the Management Group.

SAFER2028 funding is available for different project types:

- Research projects lasting one to three years, applying funding annually
- Excellence projects lasting two or three years, with funding granted for the entire duration of the project
- Doctoral education (DENSE) projects for postgraduate students receiving funding from SAFER2028 for their doctoral studies, with funding granted at maximum for four years
- Complementary education projects for further training of experts
- Infrastructure projects for improving nuclear energy and nuclear waste management research infrastructure in Finland.
- Membership fees for international participation in OECD NEA projects (Note: All memberships fees from each organisation should for one, separate proposal. This is a change to previous years.)

In addition, the Management Group can start small studies outside of the call.

Project proposals

The project proposal consists of three documents:

1) Financing proposal
2) Project plan
3) Budget and resource plan

Additionally, DENSE projects should include recommendation letters from the supervising professor and supporting organisations when applicable (see DENSE evaluation criteria below).

The projects can have one or more partnering research organisations. Projects involving more than one research organisation are known as coordinated projects, led by one project manager. Each partner organisation in a coordinated project must fill in the financing proposal (1) and the budget and resource plan (3), whereas the project plan is a common document for the whole project. In addition, a summary of the budget and resource plan (3) should be prepared for the whole project. All proposal documents from all partners should be submitted as a single application by the project management organisation.

SAFER2028 projects have no maximum limit for financing as such. VYR funded research projects typically have ranged from 50 k€ to 250 k€ with the average project size being approximately 120 k€.

Excellence project status is granted to a few, selected projects that have a high-quality research plan with clear objectives and expected outcomes for each year, and a detailed budget and resource plan for their entire duration. Excellence projects submit the full proposal in the call only for their first year and receive a funding recommendation for their entire duration.

Projects that have an Excellence or DENSE status do not need to submit the full application. For these projects, the financing proposal (1) is sufficient if there are no significant changes to the original research plan and budget. The Management Group of SAFER2028 has the right to withhold funding or require updated research and budget plans from an Excellence or DENSE project if it is not progressing as expected. In case of significant changes for the next year, Excellence project managers must submit a full, updated proposal in the

call. Small changes in Excellence projects can be approved in Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meetings and do not require action in the call.

Doctoral Education Network (DENSE) project proposals

The funding of the Doctoral Education Network (DENSE) is divided into operational funding, with a strong emphasis on networking and international collaboration, and direct salary funding. Operational funding is applied from the DENSE project (https://safer2028.fi/dense/) outside this call. Salary funding for doctoral students is available as two alternatives: (a) salary funding for doctoral students within DENSE, employed primarily at universities as full-time doctoral students, and (b) project funding covering some part of the salaries of doctoral students participating in other SAFER2028 projects. DENSE projects do not pay for costs or salaries of supervising professors or other supporting staff.

Type (a) funding for doctoral students is typically granted for a four-year period but it is possible to apply for a shorter period also. Additionally, a project for the coordination of DENSE for the six-year duration of the programme was funded in the first call of the programme.

DENSE project applications are using the same templates as other project types following the instructions for Excellence projects, with emphasis on scientific excellence, taking into account the different durations.

DENSE proposals can exceed the SAFER2028 period (that is, apply for funding up until 2030).

Submitting the proposal

Please use the templates provided for the call and listed above, in the given order (1-3). The SAFER2028 programme administration (safer2028@vtt.fi) is happy to assist with any questions related to the call and creating a proposal.

The application is submitted as follows:

1) all documents (1-3) as a single PDF file to the MEAE (kirjaamo.tem@gov.fi) and to the programme administration (safer2028@vtt.fi)
2) budget and resource plan (3) in its original format (Excel) to the programme administration (safer2028@vtt.fi).

Please note that the MEAE email above is different from previous years.

The MEAE reference number VN/12078/2026 must be referred to in the email. The name of the pdf file should be “ACRONYM_SAFER2028_2027.pdf” where ACRONYM is the acronym of the project name.

The deadline for the proposals is 9.10.2026 at 16.15.

Evaluation criteria

SAFER2028 evaluation criteria for the research (including Excellence) project proposals are:

- Development of new experts in the field of nuclear safety and/or long term safety
- Significance to nuclear safety and/or long term safety now and in the future
- Usability for end users (authorities, power companies and waste management organisations)
- Scientific level of the proposal
- Novelty of the methods and new approaches
- Use of experimental facilities
- National and international collaboration and networking
- Compatibility with the framework plan of the SAFER2028 programme.

SAFER2028 evaluation criteria for DENSE proposals are:

- scientific level of the proposal
- relevance of project proposal for scientific goals of SAFER2028 programme (in the long term)
- recommendation letter from a supervising professor
- recommendation letter from a stakeholder organisation if applicable (industry, regulator)
- international network connections
- overall participation of the host organisation in the wider SAFER2028 research programme
- complementary funding/in-kind funding already promised from other sources
- diversity of topics and disciplines within the Doctoral Education Network.

In addition to these criteria, the Management Group considers the overall research portfolio and its coverage of nationally important research topics as described in the Framework Plan. Evaluation of projects is done by experts in key nuclear safety and nuclear waste management organisations in Finland.

Other instructions

Budget for reporting and dissemination activities: Before making the application, familiarize yourself with the Terms and conditions for VYR -funded projects and the Operational Management Handbook. Each project is expected to participate in the overall activities of the SAFER2028 such as Technical Advisory Group meetings (hosted and documented by the project managers on a rotating basis), programme seminars and external evaluation. Make sure your project covers the expected project management activities and travel costs as well as work time related to these and possible other project specific dissemination activities.

Follow the requirement for own / other financing: Research organisations may receive State Nuclear Waste Management Fund (VYR) funding for up to a maximum of 70% of the project's total expenses. The remaining 30 % must be funded by the research organisation (own funding) or another organisation, e.g. an end user (other funding).

Exceptions: For participation fees related to international treaties, 100% VYR funding is possible. 100% VYR funding is also possible for small companies. Companies having 50 or fewer employees can report 50% indirect employee costs and 30% general overhead costs. A company can also propose larger general overhead costs in reporting, but then it should be based on the accounting. For bigger companies, acceptable indirect employee and general overhead costs are 50% and 50%, respectively. In addition, the de minimis rule of the EU subsidy regulations will be applied to companies.

Explain in-kind contributions (if you have them): In-kind contributions should be explained in the research plan. If the in-kind is actual funding of the research project, it should be shown as financing in the budget and resource plan and included in the expenses of the corresponding tasks. If the in-kind is another kind of contribution, such as use of equipment, it shall not be included in the project budget, but should be mentioned in the project plan.

Confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement: Certain projects, e.g. OECD/NEA projects, have confidentiality requirements that lead to a need for confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements. Their results should not be distributed to third parties and will not be published by SAFER2028 without permission from the project manager.

Links to international projects: The funding share of VYR mentioned in the funding decisions may be used as a complementary funding for participation in research projects of Euratom or other international funding programmes appropriate to the thematic areas of the research projects, provided that such participation contributes to the objectives of the VYR-funded research programme.

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