



Letter

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According to the distribution

National Nuclear Safety and Waste Management Research Programme SAFER2028 in 2025; call for proposals in autumn of 2024

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (MEAE) launched the National Nuclear Safety and Waste Management Research Programme (SAFER2028) in 2023. The key goal of SAFER2028 is to ensure the preservation and further development of nuclear safety and nuclear waste management expertise in Finland. The Framework Plan of the research programme, published in June 2022, describes the content of the research programme including the thematic areas, the objectives and the research needs of the projects to be funded. The SAFER2028 research programme is subject to the Nuclear Energy Act (990/1987), Act on Discretionary Government Grants (688/2001) and the EU State aid rules.

With this letter, the Ministry announces the call for proposals, in which project proposals can be made for the SAFER2028 programme for the year 2025. This letter, the Framework Plan, an update to the Framework Plan for Call for 2025, the instructions and templates related to the call can be found on the SAFER2028 website <https://safer2028.fi/>.

Funding in SAFER2028

In this call for proposals, funding is applied for from the National Nuclear Waste Management Fund (VYR), which will fund the SAFER2028 programme approximately with seven million euros in 2025. The SAFER2028 programme is mainly funded by the collection of fees according to the Nuclear Energy Act from organisations operating in the nuclear energy and waste management sector. Complementary funding can be applied for from other organisations that independently decide on their funding.

The SAFER2028 Framework Plan and its supplement are considered the basis for the preparation of project proposals. All project applications must include a project plan, which describes the tasks of the project and their objectives. The separate tasks must aim at a united objective. Please note that the SAFER2028 website provides templates for the financing proposal, the project plan, the budget and resource plan and the summary of the annual plan.

The call for proposals for 2025 is an open call for research and infrastructure projects with a duration of one to three years. Shorter, one or two year long, innovative, and high-risk research projects are also encouraged.

Research and infrastructure projects can also apply for Excellence project status. Excellence projects receive ministry's commitment to include the project in the annual statutory funding proposal to VYR for two or three years. The projects applying for Excellence status submit research and financing plans for the entire duration of the project.

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The approved Excellence projects send a short notification on continuation provided that the re-research has progressed according to the original plan. When significant changes to the original plan are made or problems in the progress of an excellence project are identified, an update to the re-research plan and submission of the proposal may be required to the same funding consideration as normal research projects.

It is also possible to propose a project to arrange complementary education for further training of an expert or a group of experts in nuclear energy- and waste-related subjects without actual research objectives.

The funding share of VYR may be used as a domestic contribution for participation in research projects of EU or other international funding programmes appropriate to the thematic areas of the re-research projects, if such participation contributes to the objectives of the SAFER2028 programme. In this case, the link to the project shall be clearly described in the application, including a description of the project and its funding.

The call for proposals for 2025 also includes the Doctoral Education Network (DENSE). The funding of the DENSE will be divided into operational funding, with a strong emphasis on networking and international collaboration, and direct salary funding. The operational funding is applied for in a DENSE coordination project, which decides on the further allocation of funds in accordance with its own procedures.

The call for proposals for 2025 also includes the facility cost of the laboratory part of the VTT Centre for Nuclear Safety directed only to the VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland Ltd as described in government proposal for Nuclear Energy Act Amendment (269/2021). This funding will amount to a maximum of 2 700 000 euros in 2025, after which it will cease.

The ratio of fees accruing under Section 53b (2) and (3) in the Nuclear Energy Act will be taken into account in the Funding balance between nuclear safety and waste management as described in the government proposal for the Nuclear Energy Act Amendment (269/2021).

The VYR funding share of projects is, as a rule, 70% of the total costs of the project at maximum. However, for specific reasons, a larger funding share may be granted. Participation fees in international projects and groups can be 100% VYR funded if recommended by the Management Group.

It is recommended that the authors of the project proposals are in contact with the end users and research programme governance already in the planning phase, in order to ensure the suitability of the project proposals for the SAFER2028 programme and the usability of the results. The director of the programme and the MEAE contact person will assist in establishing connections if necessary.

Evaluation criteria and project selection process

The evaluation criteria for selecting research projects in SAFER2028 are the following:

- project's ability to develop expertise
- significance to nuclear safety and waste management
- usability for end users
- 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

Infrastructure projects are evaluated specifically in terms of developing research capabilities. For doctoral project proposals, please see the evaluation process in chapter 3.3 in the Framework plan.

The Steering Groups of the SAFER2028 programme will evaluate the project proposals against the criteria mentioned above. Based on the evaluation and its own judgement, the SAFER2028 programme Management Group will make a financing recommendation of projects for 2025 to MEAE and the financiers, according to the legislation.

The amount of VYR funding in the Management Group's recommendation is at maximum the amount of available VYR funding announced by MEAE. During the Management Group's process, the financiers can agree among themselves on the direction or merging of projects and on changing the funding or scope of the project compared to the original application, if it is seen as serving the goals of SAFER2028. These kind of changes will be agreed with the authors of the project proposals, and if this is not possible, their funding will be reconsidered.

Based on the applications and the above mentioned financing recommendation, MEAE will make a proposal to VYR on a project portfolio that meets the requirements stipulated in the Nuclear Energy Act, i.e., supporting the objective of maintaining national expertise in the nuclear safety and waste management field. Other evaluation criteria for the projects selected for MEAE's proposal are the significance of the projects in terms of research needs, suitability for the above mentioned project complex, technical and scientific merits, economic affordability in relation to the goals of the project in question, the conditions of the selected organisations to achieve the planned results, and previous references.

Applications in autumn of 2024 for the year 2025

Project proposals for the nuclear safety or waste management must be submitted to the e-mail address of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment at tarjoukset.tem@gov.fi between the 9th of August and the **4th of October 2024**. Project presentations with their attachments must be submitted as a single PDF file named **ACRONYM_SAFER2028_2025.pdf** (ACRONYM is the short name of the project with a maximum of seven characters). When sending the project proposal, the limitations of the e-mail system regarding large file sizes must be taken into account. The e-mail and its documents must refer to the case number **VN/18439/2024**.

Additionally, the documents must be submitted according to the application instructions by the above-mentioned time also to the programme administration at the e-mail address safer2028@vtt.fi.

The Framework Plan of the research programme, an update to the Framework Plan for Call for 2025 as well as instructions for the call for proposals such as templates for the project plan and financing proposal can be downloaded from the SAFER2028 website, <https://safer2028.fi/>. The website also has additional information about the project evaluation procedure and schedule.

The Management Group of the SAFER2028 submits its recommendation for projects to be included in the programme to MEAE by December 31, 2024. After that, the Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority STUK will give its opinion on the MEAE's proposal, and the aim is to make decisions on VYR financing of the project portfolio by the end of March 2025.

Processing of personal data

Description of the processing of personal data in the research programme and in the funding procedure is available at <https://safer2028.fi/instructions/>.

Contact persons for MEAE and the SAFER2028 programme administration

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment contact person for SAFER2028 is Senior Specialist Mari Lahtinen, email mari.lahtinen@gov.fi, tel. 050 568 9011.

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Distribution SAFER website: <https://safer2028.fi>

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Advisory Committee on Nuclear Safety

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