The ICREA Acadèmia call offers financial support to university professors who have permanent positions in the Catalan research system. This support comes in the form of a five-year grant and it is meant to promote the research of the grantees mainly through relieving them from some teaching duties. The grant is fully compatible with any other research funding.

The extraordinary success and impact of ICREA in our system is directly related to the quality of the selection and evaluation procedures that you, as evaluator, are part of. This is a great responsibility, and ICREA is extremely grateful that you have accepted to assist us.

The selection of candidates is based on peer evaluation and has scientific excellence and leadership as its sole criteria. There are five evaluation panels, covering all areas of knowledge, with some overlap to cater to interdisciplinary and emerging fields.

The basic concept for the evaluation is that it depends essentially on the judgement of high-profile experts. We do not want to rely on quantitative measures of academic production, but rather on the highly informed judgement of the experts in recognizing excellence. We look for quality, not quantity.

ICREA fully endorses and shares the principles of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (SFDORA), by which it discourages evaluators to rely only on journal-based metrics (such as Journal Impact Factors) as a surrogate measure for the quality of individual research articles. For the purposes of research assessment, ICREA considers the value of all research outputs, including qualitative indicators of research impact such as influence on policy and practice. Consequently, when evaluating the candidate, avoid mentioning and relying too much on bibliometrics (citation index, etc.): these numbers are not comparable between subfields and scientific areas; moreover, errors in bibliometric data in evaluators’ feedback remarks may lead to justified appeals.

We encourage evaluators to treat all disciplines equally (both emerging and established) when making their decisions. Evaluators shall not defend/represent their field. Moreover, interdisciplinary research is welcomed in ICREA – even if it may sometimes be more difficult to evaluate – it must be given the same fair chance as mainstream research.

Also, we encourage the evaluators to carefully evaluate the candidate and not the institution. Biases based on the perceived reputation of the institutions should be avoided.

ICREA is an equal opportunity organization. Thus, each gender, age, nationality, racial group, etc. should have the same fair chance in the evaluation. We also encourage evaluators to be vigilant for unconscious bias when reviewing the candidatures.
Scientific excellence and leadership remain the sole criteria.

**Areas and Panels**

For organizational purposes, ICREA considers five areas of knowledge, with a different evaluation panel for each of them:

1. Social and Behavioural Sciences
2. Humanities
3. Experimental Sciences and Mathematics
4. Engineering Sciences
5. Life and Medical Sciences

Panels consist of members covering different subdisciplines (usually between six and nine people).

Interdisciplinary research will be evaluated using the expertise from more than one panel. There will always be, however, a main panel that makes the decision, and a counselling panel that contributes its opinion for consideration. Evaluators can request this cross-panel evaluation at any moment throughout the assessment process, even at the panel meeting should the need arise during the discussions.

**Goals of the call and selection criteria**

The ICREA Academia grants aim to **encourage and reward research excellence** of tenured faculty at public universities. This program is targeted to faculty that is teaching and which is in a fully active, expanding phase of their research career.

The program gives priority to detect and stimulate faculty with the greatest potential of scientific growth. The program values especially the potential impact of the grant on the candidate's research track.

Please bear in mind that the main selection criteria remain scientific and academic excellence and leadership over the last five years.

These two main criteria can be further broken down to include concepts such as: impact and relevance of publications (books, essays, journals, monographies and other contributions); citations; position in the authorship of publications and relevance of personal contribution; influence and footprint of candidates’ contributions; number and amount of national and international research projects obtained; relevance of personal contribution in these projects, leadership ability; number of supervised PhD theses, professional progression of former mentees, role in international societies of the field, invitations to speak at congresses and plenary conferences of major international events, participation and role in international research networks, participation in editorial committees, structure and quality of the research plan presented; balance between incremental research and the ability to present innovative ideas, viability of the proposed funding strategy, importance of the research proposed in the broader context of the specialty, quality and rigor of the chosen methodology, contribution to the
development of new methodologies, societal impact of research, importance and influence of books, clinical guidelines, protocols and sectorial analyses, services to the scientific and academic community, importance of the national and international research awards obtained, as well as other academic or research milestones achieved.

The above list is not necessarily complete, due to the wide range and scope of scientific and academic disciplines covered by the ICREA Acadèmia grant, although it covers most of the elements commonly used in assessments.

- **Age**

  Applicants of all ages are welcome. There are often questions as to whether there should be an age limitation in ICREA calls. In fact, there is none, outside current legal and labour regulations.

  As stated before, the goal of the call is **to detect and stimulate faculty with the greatest potential of scientific growth**, irrespective of age. The program values especially the **potential impact of the grant on the candidate's research track**.

- **Quotas**

  There are no pre-assigned quotas to the number of researchers to be selected in each domain, nor university. ICREA always operates without any kind of quotas whatsoever.

- **Gender balance**

  We at ICREA take gender inequalities very seriously. The fact remains, however, that ICREA receives many more male than female applications. In spite of the fact that the success ratio of female applicants is higher than the male success ratio, the proportion of grantees remains biased and stable about 75/25. Of course, this is a general issue across all areas of science – and society at large – but we keep wondering how this situation can be changed, and whether there are things that we should do to improve matters.

  Although the question seems unanswerable at the moment, we keep promoting public debates and scientific discussions to try to come up with solutions to this particularly resilient problem.

  We remain vigilant on this issue, and encourage panelists to share their ideas with us to try and improve the system at every call.

**Selection procedure**

The evaluation procedure consists of two phases. The first phase is online and individual, and the second one is a face-to-face meeting of the committee members where discussions come together to form a consensus and the decisions are made.

Special care is taken to ensure that online assessments truly reflect individual opinions of each member of a committee. To that end, the identity of the other members is not disclosed in the online phase, and all remarks and comments remain undisclosed until
later in the selection process. Grades are used to create the shortlist but never disclosed to avoid any mutual bias.

These measures increase the quality and independence of the comments made by each evaluator.

- **Preliminary evaluation round, or round zero:**

This year the pool of eligible universities has been enlarged, and therefore we expect a higher number of applications. To handle the new entrants and maintain a similar workload to previous calls, we have introduced this early round in the evaluation.

The ‘round zero’ is a quick way to filter out the least competitive proposals. Its purpose is to avoid extensive reviewing of candidates whose chances of success are negligible by filtering out the least competitive of the applications.

You are to review candidates in this round very quickly judging whether they can compete reasonably within the rest of the field. The assessment is based on the same criteria of academic excellence, independence, leadership, impact, etc., but no report needs to be prepared. Candidates without chances of success are simply labelled ‘Uncompetitive’.

Candidates deemed uncompetitive by a majority of the subpanel will be filtered out. They will receive a standard feedback commentary and will also lose the chance to reapply next year. The rest will go to first round proper.

- **First evaluation round: individual assessment**

In the first evaluation round, evaluators review only the applications that lie in subfields which can be considered relatively close to their expertise. This distribution helps to reduce the overall workload, since the least competitive applications need not be reviewed by the entire panel.

Evaluators are expected to write a report on each candidate and provide an indicative numerical grade between 1 and 10. As stated above, this grade does not get disclosed: it is used only to generate the shortlist (see below).

The best rated applications are then combined in a shortlist.

- **Shortlist**

Typically, the shortlist is about a quarter of the size of the initial list. A unique feature of our evaluation process is that all rounds are in fact ‘soft’. This means that any evaluator can request the inclusion of any application in the shortlist without having to justify the request. To make this possible, the process allows time in between rounds for the revision of the proposed shortlist.

- **Second evaluation round: individual assessment**

Once the shortlist is decided, the second round begins. This is analogous to the first round, except that there will be a small number of new candidates to review. Evaluators are
also asked to revisit and validate applications already graded by them in the first round, and are offered the chance to reevaluate them.

- Panel meeting & decision making

The last phase of the selection process is the panel meeting. A few days beforehand, all remarks and comments are open to all evaluators.

At the meeting, all that is required from the panel is a discussion of all shortlisted candidates and a consensus on the ranking based on the selection criteria explained above.

The strength of ICREA selection depends on the quality of the decisions made by the panels. At ICREA we discourage the use of algorithms to rank candidates. Rankings are made exclusively by consensus within the panel, and not through voting or polling.

The ranked lists produced by the panels are always fully respected.

Once the consensus has been reached, the ranked list is prepared and signed by all evaluators. The list will also include the rest of the candidates sorted by their grades. At the bottom of the list there will appear the applications judged uncompetitive, which are required to skip one edition before allowed to reapply.

Discussions are confidential and the ICREA direction does not participate in the decision-making.

- Feedback

Candidates who make it to first and second round are to receive a short report from the panel, highlighting the aspects that may benefit from further improvement. Every evaluator acts as ‘Feedback Editor’ for a small number of candidates in the call. These are assigned at the beginning of the selection process. To avoid creating any biases, however, this assignment is not disclosed until later in the selection.

Well-elaborated comments should be provided. Feedback etiquette demands the use of complete, clear, assertive sentences and polite remarks, as well as constructive critical comments. Offensive remarks shall be always avoided, as shall be any mention of personal details of the candidates (gender, family status, nationality, and the like). Finally, do not refer to specific numerical scores or data (h-index, number of publications, thesis…) since those are already known by the applicants and seldom help them to understand their ranking.

Preparing useful feedback demands some quality time. Specific time is provided at the end of the panel meeting precisely for that purpose, so that the entire panel can discuss and agree on the reports.

All other remarks and comments generated in the selection process are confidential and will not be disclosed.

To control the feedback process, each evaluator has ‘Feedback’ tab on their control panel
where candidates still awaiting feedback will appear. Below is a list of the type of communications to applicants, broken down by ranking:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked</td>
<td>Selected candidates in this list receive a selection notice. The rest receive feedback and information that they were shortlisted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortlisted</td>
<td>Receive feedback and information that they were shortlisted. The panel does not need to rank these applicants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not shortlisted</td>
<td>Receive feedback. The panel does not need to rank these applicants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncompetitive</td>
<td>Receive a standard feedback notice. The panel does not need to rank these applicants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appointment of experts, confidentiality and data security

Panels are made *ad hoc* by invitation each year. ICREA maintains a database of scholars and scientists with a high rate of turnover. Members can serve in a given panel for a maximum of four editions.

Candidates are not informed of the identity of the evaluators. In the ICREA webpage there is a list of past evaluators and committee members without indication of area or year. Your opinions are never disclosed, except when explicitly authorized by yourself.

Details of candidates, names of other experts participating in the evaluation, and the results of the panel meeting (ranked list, panel discussions etc.) must be kept strictly confidential.

Do not engage in any contact with candidates or representatives from their universities about this evaluation (neither during nor after the evaluation).

If you are ever contacted by a candidate or by representatives of their universities, **do not respond and report to ICREA immediately**.

Confidentiality is a contractual obligation and breaches can lead to termination of the contract. In case your laptop is lost or stolen, please inform ICREA immediately.

After the meeting, make sure to delete all the electronic files and destroy all hard copies you may have printed.

**Conflicts of interest**

If you find yourself in a position of conflict of interest regarding a particular applicant, or you are unable to evaluate an application for personal or professional reasons, please notify ICREA as soon as practicable, and a solution will be offered. In case of doubt, check with ICREA.
Evaluators will be asked to leave the meeting room during the deliberations over conflicted cases. The primary responsibility always lies with the individual evaluator to declare any Conflict(s) of Interest. For clarity, a conflict of interest exists if an expert:

(a) stands to benefit directly or indirectly if the applicant is selected
(b) has a close family or personal relationship with any person representing an applicant
(c) has close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.) or other close personal relationship with the applicant s/he is requested to evaluate
(d) has or has had during the last five years, a scientific collaboration with the applicant
(e) has or has had a relationship of scientific rivalry or professional hostility with the applicant (f) has or has had in the past, a mentor/mentee relationship with the applicant

Further questions
ICREA staff is here to provide you with prompt and accurate advice in all matters concerning the evaluation process. Please do not hesitate to ask if you need clarification.