



Research and Development Strategy for 2024–2027

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Introduction

The Estonian Literary Museum (ELM) is a state research and development institution under the administration of the Ministry of Education and Science of Estonia and an innovative centre of high-level basic research, advanced experimental studies, and reliable applied research in the field of cultural history and tradition. As a memory institution, the ELM plays an important role in international humanities research and provides public information services to society at large.

This Strategy outlines the principles and objectives of research at the ELM and the activities required to achieve these goals. As such, the Research Strategy supports and refines the ELM Strategic Plan 2024–2027, particularly its Strategic Objective 1, “providing basic and applied research at the international level,” and directly relates to the Estonian Research, Development, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship (RDIE) 2021–2035 focus area “Viable Estonian Society, Language and Cultural Space” and Estonia 2035 Strategy. Within its capacity, the ELM will contribute to other RDIE focus areas, such as supporting the development of artificial intelligence and the application of local knowledge resources in sustainable development, medicine, and environmental protection.

The Strategy has been devised by the Director of Research and the Research Council of ELM, who will be responsible for its implementation. The Strategy will be reviewed and amended as needed, but no later than five years after its adoption. The ELM Research and Development Action Plan 2024–2027 constitutes an Annex to the Strategy. The implementation of the Strategy will be based on a fair and secure baseline funding to provide the institution with the financial security needed to undertake risky activities in moving towards its strategic objectives. Achieving these goals does not require the expansion of the institution but rather more stable funding.

The ELM is an internationally recognised leading centre for humanities research. It has been the Centre of Excellence of Estonian Cultural History and Folkloristics (2000–2007) and was the lead partner in the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies (2016–2023) and a member of ‘Estonian Roots: Centre of Excellence for Transdisciplinary Studies on Ethnogenesis and Cultural Diversity’ (2024–2030). The ELM has initiated and sustained several innovative research directions, providing original theoretical and methodological solutions for understanding and interpreting cultures, publishing the world’s first regularly issued open-access journals of humanities, documenting new cultural phenomena, organising discussion forums for young scholars, promoting community research and educational exchange, etc. The institution also participates in national decision-making bodies and international associations in the field. The ELM continues academic cooperation with Estonian and international institutions and partners.

Research at the ELM is characterised by historically established consistent directions and outcomes. Three academic departments are involved in the research activities: the Department of Folkloristics (DF, established in 1947), the Estonian Cultural History Archives (ECHA, est. 1929),

and the Estonian Folklore Archives (EFA, est. 1927). The academic staff of the ELM represent the majority of the humaniora fields: linguistics, literary studies, folkloristics, semiotics, religious studies, ethnomusicology, and digital humanities. Research and development activities are further supported by the Archival Library (AL, est. 1909), the departmental collections of the Cultural History Archives, Estonian Folklore Archives, and the Department of Folkloristics, as well as the ELM Scholarly Press.

General Principles and Specificities of the ELM

The primary focus of the ELM is to develop a dynamic, comprehensive, and diverse perspective of Estonian culture (and other small cultures). Culture will be analysed in its entirety, in the historical and contemporary manifestations of high and folk culture. While the emphasis is on Estonia and Estonians, other ethnic groups living in Estonia will be studied as well. The ELM continues the long-standing tradition of studying Finno-Ugric cultures and documenting and analysing of diaspora communities. A logical extension of this approach is the institution's increasing ambition and expertise in investigating and conceptualising also other small nations in Europe.

The historically established scholarly activities of the ELM cover a number of research themes that are central to the comprehensive knowledge, comprehension, conceptualisation, application, and development of Estonian high and folk cultures, with distinctive academic competence in these areas at the ELM. The institution consistently integrates academic research, popularising Estonian studies and developing folk culture with an aim to ensure historical continuity and create opportunities for advancing contemporary culture. The ELM provides diverse and high-level research services, from collecting and archiving to academic research and publishing.

The ELM values the continuity of knowledge, research directions, and schools of thought, the preservation and dynamic development of the knowledge and innovations as methodologies evolve. The wealth of knowledge at the ELM which is essential for understanding ethnic culture(s) may not be relevant at all times, but should the knowledge be lost, it would be difficult to recover. Equipped with this fundamental knowledge, the ELM is prepared to focus on addressing socially and academically relevant issues.

Distinctive Areas of Competence of the ELM

History of science

History of folkloristics

Development history of the ELM's archives and collections

Multimodal, source-critical and integrated methods studies

Older cultural heritage

Oral and written culture (including vernacular written culture)

Folktales, legends, fairy tales, fictional narratives, epics

Environmental lore

Place lore

Humour studies

Minor forms and figurative language

Estonian literary studies

History of Estonian and diaspora literature

Biographies and autobiographical studies

Comparative literary studies

History of *Estica* printed materials

Ethnomusicological research

Instrumental folk music

Folksongs, including *regilaul*

Singing as a cultural phenomenon

Folk music in contemporary culture

Dynamics of folk beliefs and worldview

Estonian worldview: religion, mythology, ritual practices, and calendar tradition

Religion, mythology, and worldview of Finno-Ugric peoples

Ethnoscience (ethnomedicine, ethnobiology, ethnoastronomy, folk calendar)

Strategies of cultural memory and contemporary cultural processes

Development of methods for documenting contemporary cultural phenomena

Communal cultural processes

Diaspora studies

Research into digital culture and artificial intelligence

School lore and children's culture

Urban and technology lore

Gender perspectives in cultural processes and phenomena

Digital humanities

Corpus-based research using computational methods (Udmurt, Erzyan, Komi, Balto-Finnic and Estonian folklore, Balto-Finnic *regilaul*, correspondence, life histories, environmental communication)

Strategic Goals for Research Activities

1. The vision of the ELM is to be the leading **centre of knowledge and knowledge transfer of Estonian culture** and to use this knowledge to set the course of development for contemporary Estonian culture. To this end, we will
 - (1) continue to carry out high-level academic and popular research and to prepare, compile, and issue publications;
 - (2) actively participate in the work of various decision-making councils and initiative groups;
 - (3) initiate and manage broad-based initiatives relevant to Estonian culture.
2. The ELM contributes to **the development of citizen science** and collaborates closely with other educational and cultural institutions in Estonia to make academic co-creation a reality. To this end, we will
 - (1) continue cooperating with educational and cultural institutions across Estonia;
 - (2) continue and refine collection principles inclusive of different communities;
 - (3) support activities based on citizen science and participatory culture, as well as academic co-creation;
 - (4) organise popularisation activities supporting citizen science under the auspices of the ELM Centre of Education.

3. The ELM is an internationally recognised **centre of research into small cultures**. To this end, we will
 - (1) continue high-level international scientific collaboration and publishing activities;
 - (2) continue the long-standing tradition of collecting and analysing data on Finno-Ugric cultures;
 - (3) expand international cooperation in the study of other small cultures, particularly in Europe.
4. The ELM is involved in **transdisciplinary Estonian studies and international cooperation**. To this end, we will
 - (1) address research problems related to national culture(s) in combining different sources, methods, and disciplines (humanities, social sciences, natural sciences);
 - (2) apply the R&D potential of the ELM to be a research centre or a significant partner in various research directions (diaspora studies, person-centred historical and cultural history studies, traditional food culture, ecology, digital (national) culture studies).
5. The **academic collections** of the ELM are widely used in society and academia. To this end, we will
 - (1) continue the research-based development and expanding of archival collections with the participation of researchers, e.g., through fieldwork, collection campaigns, etc.;
 - (2) support the consolidation of digitised collections with the aim of achieving a user-friendly platform;
 - (3) continue preparing critical source publications and developing modern user-friendly solutions;
 - (4) continue archive-based academic research.
6. The ELM ensures a sustainable and balanced **academic staff** in terms of gender, age, and academic competence. To this end, we will
 - (1) cooperate with higher education institutions in supervising doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers and affiliating them to the institutions, while supporting age equality;
 - (2) encourage active participation of the ELM's researchers in teaching activities and academic events, both in Estonia and abroad, and establish contacts between students and the younger generation of researchers who join the ELM's staff on a permanent or temporary basis.
7. ELM offers an **inspiring and supportive research environment**. To this end, we will
 - (1) ensure the integration of in-house research activities at the ELM;
 - (2) establish motivational incentives with clear rules for recognising researchers;
 - (3) encourage inter-institutional collaboration and support researchers' individual development;
 - (4) identify the need for instructional courses in ELM and offer relevant training and assignments to enhance researchers' competence;

- (5) develop a motivating career model to support researchers' initiative and commitment to realising the institution's goals and strategic visions.
8. The ELM's research activities are founded on **long-term and stable baseline funding and the institution's enhanced capacity** to apply for both domestic and international research and development projects. To this end, we will
 - (1) assist principal investigators and project managers in applying for funding, provide professional project writing services;
 - (2) establish in-house motivational incentives to encourage researchers to apply for funding;
 - (3) offer compensation to principal investigators and project managers in major projects;
 - (4) seek opportunities for the ELM to provide regular public services;
 - (5) foster cooperation with the entrepreneurial sector to disseminate knowledge transfer.