



The Romanian - EEA Research Programme 2014 – 2021 Guide for Evaluators

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1. Introduction

This document specifies in detail the evaluation process and defines the responsibilities of the experts in the call. The Guide for Evaluators is based on Guideline for Research Programmes – Rules for the establishment and implementation of programmes falling under the Programme Area “Research” and applies to the evaluation of applications under EEA Grants – Call for Proposals 2018.

The Guide for Evaluators complements the Call Document and the Guide for Applicants. Both evaluators and applicants are kindly asked to familiarize themselves with the procedure described herein.

2. Eligibility Check

The list of submitted project proposals will be published on the Programme Operator (PO) (UEFISCDI) websites (www.uefiscdi.gov.ro), before proceeding to the eligibility check and evaluation process. In this stage, proposals are checked against the eligibility criteria applicable to this call. The eligibility criteria are rigorously applied. Proposals failing any of them do not proceed with evaluation.

The project proposals are verified by the PO, in order to assure that all the eligibility criteria are fulfilled, both for the beneficiaries (Project Promoters and Project Partners) and Principal Investigators (PIs).

The eligibility is checked on the basis of the information given by the Project Promoter in the proposal. If it becomes clear before, during, or after the evaluation phase that one or more of the eligibility criteria have not been fulfilled, the proposal is declared ineligible and is withdrawn from any further examination.

The proposal which contravenes fundamental ethical principles may be excluded at any time from the process evaluation, selection and award.

The following eligibility criteria apply to all proposals submitted under the call:

- submission of proposal before the deadline date and time established in the call, using the online submission system www.uefiscdi-direct.ro;
- minimum conditions (such as number of participants, proposals written in English language, etc), as referred to in the call for proposals;
- completeness of the proposal, i.e. the presence of all requested administrative forms and the proposal description (the completeness of the information contained in the proposal will be for the experts to evaluate; the eligibility check applies only to the presence of the appropriate parts of the proposal).

The lists containing the approved and rejected projects proposals as a result of the eligibility check will be published on PO website.

Project Promoters who wish to appeal the eligibility results could send their complaints to the PO.

Final decision about registered appeals will be made by PO within 5 working days.

Apart of the eligibility criteria mentioned above, the content of the proposal must relate to the scope of the call/research programme. This request is verified in the later stage by evaluators according to Section O from Project Application Form – Part B and Criterion O from Evaluation Form. A proposal will be deemed ineligible on grounds of “scope” only in clear-cut cases.

3. Evaluators

The evaluators are invited to evaluate the proposals closely related to their field of expertise.

The experts perform the work in a personal capacity and must not represent any organization.

3.1 Contractual Agreement

The relationship between the PO and evaluators is defined by a written and signed contractual agreement. Signature of this agreement by the expert indicates acceptance of the conditions regarding confidentiality, conflict of interest, and use of personal data by the PO. The PO cannot make available proposals to an expert who has not been officially appointed (i.e signed the contractual agreement and, in so doing, agreeing to the terms laid down in it including in particular, confidentiality and conflict of interest aspects).

The evaluators will be remunerated for their efforts (individual evaluation and panel review), after the finalization of the evaluation process. The panel members will be reimbursed of the travel and accommodation expenses or allowance incurred for their attendance to panel meeting (if applicable).

Each expert involved in the evaluation process will receive a username and an individual access password via e-mail with which he/she can authenticate/log in on www.uefiscdi-direct.ro, the online evaluation platform. A guideline for using the online evaluation platform will be available for the evaluators.

3.2 Conflict of Interest

The experts must declare that they can fulfill the evaluation of a proposal with total confidence, impartiality and competence. Experts should not be put in a situation in which their impartiality might be questioned, or where the suspicion could arise that recommendations are affected by elements that lie outside the scope of the evaluation.

There is distinction between “a disqualifying” and “potential” conflicts of interests.

A disqualifying conflict of interest exists if an expert:

- Was involved in the preparation of the proposal;
- Stands to benefit directly should the proposal be accepted;
- Has a close family relationship with the applicant;
- Is a director, trustee or partner of an applicant organization;
- Is employed by one of the applicant organizations in a proposal;
- Is in any other situation that compromises his or her ability to evaluate the proposal impartially.

When a disqualifying conflict of interest is reported by the expert or established by the PO on the basis of any available source of information, the expert shall not evaluate the proposal concerned.

A potential conflict of interest may exist, even in cases not covered by the clear disqualifying conflicts indicated above, if an expert:

- Was employed by one of the applicant organizations in a proposal within the previous 3 years;
- Is involved in a contract or research collaboration with one of the applicant organizations, or had been so in the previous 3 years;
- Is in any other situation that could cast doubt on his or her ability to evaluate the proposal impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an external third party.

When a “potential” conflict of interest is reported by the expert or brought to the attention of the PO by any means, the PO will consider the circumstances of the case and will decide, on the basis of the objective elements of information at its disposal, on the existence of an effective conflict of interest. If such an effective conflict is established the expert will be excluded in the same manner as for a disqualifying conflict.

3.3 Task of experts

The experts are kindly asked to:

- Read the Call Document, Guide for Applicants and the present Guide for Evaluators;
- Sign in advance the “Contractual Agreement”;
- Read the assigned proposals;
- Complete and submit the evaluation form for each assigned proposal, providing comments and individual scoring for the proposals;
- Participate at consensus/panel discussions for all the projects assigned and express the agreement/disagreement for the consensus report, in due time;
- Complete and submit the consensus report form (tasks of rapporteur);

- Inform PO about the disqualifying or a potential conflict of interests;
- Not disclose the proposals assigned for their evaluation to third parties.

4. Evaluation of proposals

4.1 Individual Evaluation

Each proposal is the subject to at least three independent evaluators. During the individual evaluation process, there shall be no discussions of the proposals between experts.

Each eligible proposal is evaluated independently, online, in accordance with the selection and award criteria. After the individual evaluation of a proposal, the expert completes an Individual Evaluation Report confirming his/her individual reading and assessment, as follows:

Criterion 0: Relevance in relation to the objectives and priorities of the call / research programme

This criterion is considered an elimination criterion. The project should be assessed if it fits the call objectives / research programme and thematic areas and deals with sensitive ethical issues (if applicable).

If the answer is “no”, the project is rejected and there is no need for further evaluation. Please note that answer “no” should be given only in clear-cut cases. If the case is not clear-cut, evaluators must write their comments, evaluate the proposal and discuss it during the consensus stage. If a proposal is considered to be out of scope by all individual experts, it may be considered to be ineligible. Thus, a proposal which is not coherent with the scope of the call it is rejected from further evaluation.

Criterion 1: Scientific and/or technical excellence

The criterion relates to Section 1 from Project Application Form – Part B

To what extent:

- Is the project topic answering a well-defined problem/question with scientific and/or practical relevance?
- Is the project proposal positioning well described with respect to the state of the art or to technological innovation?
- Does the project proposal contribute to a significant (clearly identified) progress beyond the state of the art?
- Are the objectives, methodologies and technologies of the project appropriate? Is the project innovative in terms of scientific or technological innovation or prospects of innovation, and challenge?

Criterion 2: Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management, including quality and implementation capacity of the applicants and contribution to capacity and competence building

The criterion relates to Section 2 from Project Application Form – Part B

To what extent:

- Is the coordination plan adequate? Does the task schedule comply with the assumed objectives and deliverables? Is the schedule realistic?
- Are the resources adequate to the project (existing research infrastructure and requested upgrade/development of the research infrastructure)? Are the requested equipment purchases well justified and relevant?
- Are the person-months resources well justified? In particular, is the involvement of PI significant and sufficient for a proper implementation of the project?
- Is the financial part well justified and adequate?
- Are the Principal Investigator (PI) expertise and previous achievements sound and suitably related to the project topic? How well qualified is the PI to conduct the project towards its stated objectives?
- Are the partner research teams leaders well qualified (with respect to their expertise and previous achievements) to conduct the corresponding activities within the project and fulfill the associated tasks?
- Are the partnership and the partner teams' structure correlated with the tasks, within the framework of the technical or scientific objectives? Do the companies involved play an active role in the project (if applicable)?
- Is it clearly demonstrated that the project is developed collaboratively between participating countries/institutions? Is there added value created through this collaboration? Are there complementarities between the partners?
- Is the work plan structured with clearly identified and adequate milestones and deliverables? Are the project tasks adequately defined and assigned to partners? Is the partners' contribution in the project well balanced with respect to their expertise and previous achievements?
- Are the young researchers integrated in the project?
- Are the ethical aspects treated in accordance with standard rules and regulations applicable?

Criterion 3: Potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results

The criterion relates to Section 3 from Project Application Form – Part B

To what extent:

- Does the project build the experience and competence of the researchers/ organization involved?
- Does the project influence a long-term collaboration among the partners concerned? Are the dedicated actions exploring the potential for further applications to other international calls credible?
- Are the dissemination and exploitation of the expected results clearly stated and realistic?
- Does the project lead towards distinct improvements of the quality of life, performance and/or efficiency of products, technologies and/or services?
- Is the project positioning in the industrial strategy of the project partner companies (if applicable)? Is there a strategy for further valorization of the project results?

Organizing comments on each criterion

Comments should take the form of a statement reflecting the key strengths and key weaknesses of the proposal, in the light of the above mentioned criteria. In particular, the following guidelines should be followed:

- Make sure that each argument is put under the right criterion and that comments are confined only to the criterion concerned;
- Do not criticize a proposal twice for the same shortcoming. A basic underlying fault in a proposal could impact more than one criterion, make clear that these are different and distinct problems;
- Do not criticize a proposal based on information that the applicant was not expected to provide;
- Make sure that the level of criticism in your comments agrees with the score that you provide.

In conclusion, the experts should make sure that their comments on each criterion are:

Concrete i.e., they are explicitly referring to the information in the proposal;

Complete i.e., they address all the facets specified by the criterion;

Consistent i.e., they match the score, according to the scoring table.

Guidelines for choosing a score

Experts examine the issues to be considered comprising each evaluation criterion and score these on a scale from 0 to 5. Half point scores may be given. For each criterion under examination, score values indicate the following assessments:

Score		Explanation
5	EXCELLENT	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.
4	VERY GOOD	The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.
3	GOOD	The proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary.
2	FAIR	While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
1	POOR	The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
0		The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.

In scoring each criterion the experts should take into account the following guidelines:

- Choose a score only after you have written the comments;
- The score of 5 should only be awarded to proposals of exceptionally high quality (high international caliber and major scientific/technical impact);
- If a score of 3 or 4 is used (improvements are necessary/possible) make sure that the required improvements are described;
- If a score of 1 or 2 is used, make sure that the inherent/significant weaknesses are described in concrete terms.

Note: The final score will be calculated as a sum of the grades for each of the three criteria.

4.2 Consensus Assessment

Once all the experts to whom a proposal has been assigned have completed their individual assessments, the evaluation progresses to a consensus assessment. At this stage, each evaluator will have access to the scores and comments of the other evaluators. If they consider it necessary, the experts may adjust their initial scores.

The outcome of the consensus step is the Consensus Report (consolidated report) elaborated by one of the three experts, acting as rapporteur, based on individual evaluations and

discussions with the other two experts (through a “forum” type interface available on evaluation web platform).

The task of rapporteur is to coordinate the consensus discussions and to write the Consensus Report, with direct involvement of all experts. Subsequently, the other two experts will be requested, through the platform, to express their opinion on the consensus report (vote “agree” or “disagree”).

If during the consensus process it is not possible to bring all the experts to a common point of view on any particular aspect of the proposal (at least one vote “disagree”), the PO may ask an additional expert to examine the proposal. Taking into consideration all four individual assessments, the consensus/consolidate report form sets out the majority view of the experts but also records any dissenting views from any particular expert(s).

Everyone’s voice must be heard, and all must agree to the scores and comments of Consensus Report. Therefore the experts should:

- Agree on comments before scores;
- Insist on factual comments, not unsupported opinion;
- Make clear the differences so they can be resolved;
- Avoid reference to the applicant age, nationality, gender or personal matters;
- Avoid any direct comparison with any other proposals and avoid any reference or comparison with previous assessments;
- Indicate missed facets (listed under each evaluation criterion), if necessary.

In order to improve the comprehensibility of the funding decisions, the consensus report needs to fulfill additional quality requirements:

- The arguments in the consensus should be based on the individual reviews, eliminating possible redundancies;
- Any new positive and negative argument raised needs to be clearly highlighted and justified with evidence;
- Factual information which has a major influence on the funding decision needs to be checked on validity.

4.3 Panel review

The panel is the final step involving international experts. It allows them to formulate their recommendations to the Programme Committee having had an overview of the results of the consensus step.

The panels are appointed by the PO for each thematic area. They may comprise international experts involved at the consensus step, new experts or mixture of the two. Each panel is either

chaired by one expert appointed by the PO. A panel rapporteur (who may also be the panel chairperson) may be appointed to draft the panel's advice.

The main task of the panels is to examine and compare the consensus reports, to check on the consistency of the scores and comments, where necessary, propose a new set of score or revision of comments.

The panels also must resolve cases where a minority view was recorded in the consensus report.

The outcome of the panel review is a Panel Report, consist of:

- Final Report for each proposal (the Final Report could be the Consensus Report, if panel agrees);
- A list of proposals passing all thresholds and the panel recommendations for priority order;
- A list of evaluated proposals having failed one or more thresholds;
- A list of any proposals having been found ineligible during the evaluation;
- A summary of any other recommendations of the panel.

The Panel Report must be agreed by at least three panel experts, including the panel rapporteur (if case) and the chair person.

4.4 Thresholds and the ranking lists

A proposal can obtain a total number of 15 points in the evaluation procedure. In order to be considered for funding, a proposal must receive at least a score of 9, and pass all the thresholds according to the following values:

Criterion	Thresholds
<i>Relevance in relation to the objectives and priorities of the call/ research programme</i>	YES
<i>Scientific and/or technical excellence</i>	3/5
<i>Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management, including quality and implementation capacity of the applicants and contribution to capacity and competence building</i>	3/5
<i>Potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results</i>	3/5

Based on the evaluation results, the PO draws up the 7 preliminary ranking lists (one for each thematic area of the Programme (6) and one for the projects primarily falling under key topic “Roma inclusion and empowerment”).

5. Award of project grants

The PO prepares preliminary ranking lists, one for each thematic area and one for the projects under the key topic “Roma inclusion and empowerment” with a suggested grant amount for each proposal.

Prior to the meeting, the PO will provide access to the Programme Committee members at evaluated proposals, individual reviews, consensus reports and panel reports. The task of the Programme Committee is to decide about the final ranking order of the proposals on the basis of the total consensus scores assigned to the projects and the panel reports.

Within the groups of equally scored proposals for each thematic area, the criteria for ranking are applied in the following order:

- 1) Bilateral cooperation
- 2) Gender balance in the project
- 3) Young researchers (up to 5 years after awarding PhD)

Within the Social sciences and Humanities thematic area there will be an emphasis on gender studies and social inclusion studies.

The PO awards individual grants to projects based on the final ranking lists approved by the Programme Committee.

The lists of selected projects are published on the PO website.

6. Appeals

The Project Promoters who wish to appeal the final results could send their complaints to the PO. The comments and scores given by experts and members of panels will not be subject to appeals. Grounds for appeals include conflicts of interest and errors in administrative procedure.

7. Transparency

The list of experts who participated in evaluation process will be published on the PO website after the funding decisions. The list will not identify which expert evaluated which proposal.

After the selection procedure is complete and the decision on the award of grants is made public, the PO sends electronically the individual experts evaluations reports, consensus and

panel reports (as applicable), to the Project Promotor of each evaluated proposal. The Project Promoter must inform the Project Partners about these documents.

8. Contact Persons

UEFISCDI:

Monica Cruceru – office: + 40 21 308 05 61

IT department (technical support for submission and evaluation platform): support@uefiscdi-direct.ro

Email address: eeagrants@uefiscdi.ro