

# The Romanian - EEA Research Programme 2012 – 2017 Guide for Evaluators (Peer – Reviewers)

## Contents

1. Introduction .....	2
2. Eligibility Check.....	2
3. Reviewers .....	3
3.1 Contract.....	3
3.2 Conflict of Interest.....	4
4. Stages of the Peer – Review Process.....	5
4.1 Individual Evaluation .....	5
4.2 Consensus Report .....	8
5. Thresholds and the ranking lists.....	11
6. Role of the Programme Committee .....	12
7. Funding Decision .....	13
8. Transparency .....	13

## 1. Introduction

This document specifies in detail the reviewing process and defines the responsibilities of the participants in the process. The Guide for Evaluators is based on Annex 12 to the Regulation on the implementation of EEA Financial Mechanisms 2009-2014 and applies to the evaluation of applications to calls for proposals issued by the Romanian-EEA Research Programme (2012-2017).

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

## 2. Eligibility Check

The list of submitted project proposals will be published on the Implementing Agency<sup>1</sup>/Programme Operator<sup>2</sup> websites, 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 IA staff, in order to assure that all the eligibility criteria are fulfilled, both for the beneficiaries (Project Promoters – PPs) and Principle Investigators (PIs).

The eligibility is checked on the basis of the information given by the Project Promoter in the proposal. If at a later stage, an eligibility criterion is found not to be fulfilled (for example, due to incorrect or misleading information, the proposal will be immediately rejected).

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:

- receipt of proposal by the IA before the deadline date and time established in the call;
- minimum conditions (such as number of participants, eligible beneficiaries), 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);

---

<sup>1</sup> IA - Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI)

<sup>2</sup> PO - Ministry of National Education (MEN)

- it is forbidden to submit a proposal which seeks to fund activities which had already obtained funding from the other sources;
- proposals need to be submitted in English using the online submission system: [www.uefiscdi-direct.ro](http://www.uefiscdi-direct.ro).

The lists consist of the approved and rejected projects proposals as a result of the eligibility check will be published on IA/PO websites.

Project Promoters who wish to appeal the eligibility results can send their complains by email to [eeagrants@uefiscdi.ro](mailto:eeagrants@uefiscdi.ro), by fax to 021 3071919, or directly to the IA headquarters, within 3 workdays from the date of publication of the eligibility results. The list of received appeals will be published on IA/PO websites.

Final decision about registered appeals will be made by IA's general director within 5 working days, after consulting the Programme Committee members.

### 3. Reviewers

The reviewers are independent, international experts (researchers) with a good international visibility in a specific research area. They are invited to evaluate the proposals closely related to their field of expertise.

Reviewers are recruited from the EU Commissions Database of Experts and from existing national data base of international experts having experience in evaluating project applications at international level.

#### 3.1 Contract

The relationship between the IA and reviewers is defined by a written and signed contractual agreement. Signature of this agreement by the reviewer indicates acceptance of the conditions regarding confidentiality, conflict of interest, and use of personal data by the IA. The IA cannot make available proposals to a reviewer 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 reviewers 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 of the proposals;
- Participate at consensus discussions for all the projects assigned and express the agreement / disagreement for the consensus report;

- Complete and submit the consensus report form (tasks of rapporteur).

Each expert reviewer involved in the evaluation process will receive a user name and an individual access password via e-mail with which he/she can authenticate/log on the on-line evaluation platform, [www.uefiscdi-direct.ro](http://www.uefiscdi-direct.ro). A guideline for using the on-line evaluation platform will be available for the reviewers.

### 3.2 Conflict of Interest

The reviewers must declare that they can fulfill the evaluation of a proposal with total confidence, impartiality and competence. Reviewers 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 review.

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.

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.

Reviewers must immediately announce the IA (by any means) once they notice that one of the aforementioned conditions is not anymore fulfilled. The IA 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.

## 4. Stages of the Peer – Review Process

### 4.1 Individual Evaluation

Each proposal shall be subject to at least three individual reviews. During the individual reviewing process, there shall be no discussions of the proposals between reviewers. Moreover, during the remote evaluation of the proposals reviewers should not disclose the proposals assigned for their evaluation to third parties.

All proposals are assessed whether they fit the description of the “Thematic Areas” presented in the Call Document. If a proposal is not coherent with the scope of the programme it will be rejected from further evaluation.

Each eligible proposal is evaluated independently, online, by evaluators, in accordance with the selection and award criteria (specified in Annex 12 of Regulation), as follows:

- Relevance in relation to the objectives and thematic areas of the Programme;
- Scientific and/or technical excellence;
- Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management, including quality and implementation capacity of the applicants and contribution to capacity and competence building;
- The potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results.

#### 4.1.1 The Evaluation Form

##### ***Criterion 0: Coherence with the call topic***

This criterion is considered an elimination criterion. The project proposal should be assessed if it fits the call objectives and thematic areas.

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 your case is not clear-cut, reviewers 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.

Also, for the project proposals addressing Roma population issues the experts must confirm with brief justification that the project proposals fit this specific focus.

##### ***Criterion 1: Scientific and/or technical excellence - 40%***

To what extent:

- Is the project topic answering a well-defined problem/question with 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 of the project proposal appropriate? Are the technological / scientific bottlenecks properly addressed?
- Is the project proposal innovative in terms of scientific or technological innovation or prospects of innovation, and ambitious?
- Does the project proposal display and prove inter-, multi-, or trans-disciplinary character?

**Criterion 2: Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management – 40%**

To what extent:

- 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 clear why the project proposal must be developed cooperatively between participating countries/institutions? Is there added value created through this collaboration? Are there synergies and 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 load well balanced with respect to partners' expertise and previous achievements?
- 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 manpower (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?

### **Criterion 3: Impact and dissemination of the project results – 20%**

To what extent:

- How the project builds the experience and competence of the researchers/ organization involved?
- How the project influences a long-term collaboration among the partners concerned?
- Are the dissemination and exploitation of the expected results clearly stated and realistic?
- Are the project outcomes leading toward a distinct improvement of the quality of life, performance and/or efficiency of products, technologies and/or services?
- How well is the project positioned in the industrial strategy of the project partner SMEs? Is there a strategy for further valorization of the project results? (if applicable)

#### **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 comments are confined only to the criterion concerned;
- Do not punish a proposal twice for the same “crime”. A basic underlying fault in a proposal could impact more than one criterion, make clear that these are different and distinct problems;
- Never punish 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, reviewers 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
0		The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information
1	POOR	The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses
2	FAIR	While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses
3	GOOD	The proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary
4	VERY GOOD	The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible
5	EXCELLENT	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor

In scoring each criterion reviewers 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 weighed by the corresponding percentage and multiplying by 20 (final score range between 0 and 100 points).*

#### 4.2 Consensus Report

Once all the experts to whom a proposal has been assigned have completed their individual assessments, the evaluation progresses to a consensus assessment, representing their common views.

Each evaluator will have access to the scores and comments of the other evaluators. If they consider it necessary, reviewers may adjust their initial scores.

The outcome of the consensus stage is the consensus report (consolidated report), approved by all the experts.

For each proposal, one of the experts is appointed by IA as rapporteur in a random manner. The task of rapporteur is to coordinate the consensus discussion and to write the consensus report, with direct involvement of all reviewers. If during the consensus discussion it seems impossible to bring all the experts to a common point of view on any particular aspect of the proposal, the IA may ask additional experts to examine the proposal. In the case that it is impossible to reach a consensus, the consensus report form sets out the majority view of the experts but also records any dissenting views from any particular expert(s).

All discussions between experts will be done only via the evaluation platform.

#### 4.2.1 Consensus Report Form

The “Consensus Report Form” consists of:

- I. Introduction (including ethical considerations)
- II. Evaluation Criteria
- III. General Opinion

The Consensus Report gives the final view of the proposal. Everyone’s voice must be heard, and all must agree to the final scores and comments. Therefore reviewers 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.

### ***Introduction (including ethical considerations)***

This part of the consensus report contains:

- Brief description of the proposal;
- Critical analysis of its aims.

If there are ethical considerations, please state if they have been sufficiently addressed or if they need to be addressed more specifically.

### ***Evaluation Criteria***

The report must include a few lines of summary on how evaluation criteria were met by the proposal, based on strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.

The reviewers give a final score for each criterion agreed by all. This scoring has the same scale and explanations used for individual reviews.

Comments should be suitable for feedback to the proposal Project Promoter.

### ***General Opinion***

Reviewers must provide an overall opinion to reflect their assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved (thematic area). Also, they must provide recommendations and advice for improvement (if it is the case).

*Please, do not repeat detailed comments provided already in the "Evaluation Criteria" section.*

Based on evaluation criteria and overall opinion, the reviewers must select the funding recommendation, as follows:

Funding Recommendation	Explanation
Strongly Recommended for funding	Project Proposal is addressing a problem of high importance/interest in the thematic area. May have some or no weaknesses.
Medium Recommended for funding	Project proposal may be addressing a problem of high importance in the thematic area, but weaknesses in the criteria reduce the overall impact to medium. <i>or</i> Project proposal may be addressing a problem of moderate importance, with some or no weaknesses.
Not recommended for funding	Project proposal may be addressing a problem of moderate / high importance in the thematic area, but weaknesses in the criteria reduce the overall impact to low. <i>or</i> Applications may be addressing a problem of low or no importance in the field, with some or no weaknesses.

The funding recommendation must be in accordance with the thresholds established for each selection criterion.

## 5. Thresholds and the ranking lists

A proposal can obtain a total number of 100 points in the evaluation procedure. In order to be recommended for funding, a proposal must receive 75 points and pass all the thresholds according to the following values:

Criterion	Thresholds	Weight
<i>Coherence with the call topic</i>	YES	Precondition
<i>Scientific and/or technical excellence</i>	3/5 – 24 points/40 points	40% - 40 points
<i>Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management</i>	3/5 - 24 points/40 points	40% - 40 points
<i>Impact and dissemination of the project results</i>	3/5 - 12 points/20 points	20% - 20 points

Based on the evaluation results, the IA/PO draws up 4 ranking lists (one for each thematic area of the Programme) to be discussed by the Programme Committee. These ranking lists are split out into 3 sections: proposals strongly recommended for funding, proposals medium

recommended for funding, proposals not recommended for funding. The section with the proposals medium recommended for funding could be considered as a reserve list.

## 6. Role of the Programme Committee

The Programme Committee discusses the ranking list and recommends the proposals for funding to the PO. While making recommendation for funding, the Programme Committee takes into consideration the overall quality of the proposals (ranking lists), a similar success rate for each thematic area and the total earmarked budget to the call with the following conditionality:

- at least EUR 4.337.000 shall be earmarked for projects under the area of research “Social sciences and humanities” including research on the bilateral relations between the Donor states and Romania;
- up to EUR 3.000.000 shall be allocated to projects in the area of renewable energy;
- at least EUR 2.353.000 shall target research contributing to the improvement of the situation of the Roma population, across all thematic areas.

The outcome of this discussion is the final ranking list approved by the Programme Committee, containing the proposals recommended for funding and the associated budgets. In the event that several project proposals within the same thematic area received the same evaluations (number or points and recommendation) the Programme Committee will apply the following criteria to determine the position of a given project on the ranking list in the following order of priority:

1. Score on the criterion of scientific excellence;
2. Relevance to the overall objectives of the Programme;
3. Involvement of young researchers;
4. Gender-balance in the research teams.

In case, after following the evaluation of proposals submitted under the call for proposals, there is an insufficient number of projects achieving the overall threshold within the area of research “Social sciences and the humanities”, i.e. to comply with the minimum 20% allocation to such projects, the Programme Committee shall make a final decision on the allocation of the remaining funds.

In case, after following the evaluation of proposals submitted under the call for proposals, there is an insufficient number of projects achieving the overall threshold that target the improvement of the situation of the Roma population, i.e. to comply with the minimum 10% allocation to such projects, the Programme Committee shall make a final decision on the allocation of the remaining funds.

## **7. Funding Decision**

The PO issues the decision for each project to be funded based on PC recommendation.

## **8. Transparency**

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

The lists consists of received, eligible and funded projects will be published on the PO/IA websites.

Applicants will receive the individual assessments and the consensus report for their project proposal.