



Approved by the Programme Committee
18.12.2012

Norwegian-Estonian Research Cooperation Programme

Guide for Evaluators

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE NORWEGIAN-ESTONIAN RESEARCH COOPERATION PROGRAMME (hereafter “the Programme”)

The overall objective of the Programme is to enhance research-based knowledge development in Estonia through research cooperation between Norway and Estonia.

The Programme, through a single call for proposals for projects from all areas of research, is designed to ensure the quality and high level of research. The Programme shall strengthen bilateral relations with the aim of stimulating long-term cooperation, capacity and competence-building. An important objective of the Programme is to strengthen human resources in research through facilitating international relations and involving PhD and master’s students in the projects.

The aim of the Programme is to foster the exchange of scientific knowledge between Norwegian and Estonian researchers and to establish advanced and synergistic collaborative research between research institutions in Norway and Estonia. The Programme will be implemented through joint research projects, enabling advanced researchers bring together complementary skills, knowledge, and resources in order to jointly address research problems. The Programme shall contribute to the strengthening of existing, and the creation of new, long-term cooperative relations between Estonian and Norwegian research institutions and research teams.

Some examples of what is expected to be achieved by the cooperation projects:

- Internationally refereed (*joint*) publications published on the basis of the results of the project;
- New scientific methods acquired/training in relation to the scientific methods as part of the project, developing scientific methodology;
- Active involvement of PhD students in the project;
- Preparation of joint proposals to be submitted to the European financing initiatives (FP, JPI, ERA-NET) as part of the project;
- Close cooperation between the partners involved in the project from Estonia and Norway with the aim of building sustainable cooperation for future activities;
- Knowledge transfer, sharing of experiences and best practices.

The Programme is open to projects

- with or without additional funding from other sources;
- with different kind and number of project partners involved;
- with already established cooperation with the project partner(s) to be involved as well as projects with the aim of establishing and building up new partnerships;
- with or without a link to other programmes (including other Norway/EEA Grants programmes).

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Please note that these conditions (existing additional funding, number of partners, etc.) should not place any project automatically in a more favourable position compared to others in the evaluation process. No additional points will be added based on these conditions.

The Programme was designed and developed to fit within the principles and priorities envisaged by the Estonian Research and Development and Innovation Strategy 2007-2013 'Knowledge-based Estonia', addressing the challenges and needs of Estonia and focusing on sustainable development of the society by means of research and development and innovation. For background information, the 'Report on achieving the objectives and implementing the strategy in 2010 and 2011' is attached to the guide. The report gives an overview of implementation of the activities provided for by the Strategy, progress of indicators and the overall state of research, development and innovation in Estonia in 2010-2011. General information about the results of the call will be sent to the experts as well.

2. EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation of the proposals submitted to the Programme includes the following steps:

- 1) The Estonian Research Council (hereinafter referred to as "the ETAg") as the implementing agency of the Programme checks the proposals against the eligibility criteria listed in the "Guide for applicants".
- 2) Each eligible proposal is sent to at least three independent international experts based on their closest possible competence in relation to the topic of the proposal and expertise necessary to cover the evaluation criteria set. The ETAg appoints one of the experts as the 'rapporteur' for the group of evaluators working on the same proposal, making him/her responsible for formulating a consensus report on the proposal.
- 3) Each expert examines the received proposals individually and submits an individual evaluation report on each proposal separately through the Estonian Research Information System (hereinafter referred to as "the ETIS") by a given deadline. The proposals are evaluated on the basis of their individual merits applying the criteria presented in this guide, according to the principles of confidentiality and the conflicts of interest rules. The evaluation is done by the experts alone.
- 4) After the deadline of submissions set for the evaluators, the rapporteur goes through the individual evaluation reports of the proposals under his/her responsibility and prepares in the ETIS a consensus report which must be approved by all the experts working on the same proposal.
- 5) Based on the consensus reports, the ETAg presents a ranking list of the proposals to the Programme Committee.

The Programme Committee meets for an evaluation meeting in Tallinn during the period of July/August 2013. The Programme Committee gives recommendations to the Programme Operator about funding based on the scores, comments and ranking given to them by the ETAg.

2.1. Evaluation by individual international experts

The ETAg checks the proposals against the eligibility criteria listed in the 'Guide for Applicants'. Each eligible proposal is sent to at least three independent international experts (with a doctoral degree or an equivalent academic degree) based on their closest possible competence in relation to the topic of the proposal and expertise necessary to cover the evaluation criteria set. The list of experts to be used for evaluation is decided by the ETAg. Individual evaluations will be available for the applicants (without the experts' names).

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Each independent international expert examines the received proposal(s) individually and submits an **individual evaluation form** on each proposal separately through the Estonian Research Information System ("the ETIS") by the deadline set. The proposals are evaluated on the basis of their individual merits applying the criteria presented in this guide, according to the principles of confidentiality and the conflicts of interest rules.

Experts need to check first that there is no conflict of interest related to the proposals appointed to her/him. The criteria for conflict of interest are presented in Annex I. Before starting to submit the individual evaluation reports to the ETIS, the expert has to confirm that there is no conflict of interest related to the proposal that is to be evaluated. If in any doubt, experts are advised to consult the ETAg.

2.1.2. How to use the ETIS for preparing the individual evaluations

Step 1. Please go to the address <https://www.etis.ee/login.aspx?lang=en>

Click on "Enter ETIS" tab on the top right hand corner. Now you can insert your **username and password** as provided by your ETAg contact person. This gives you access to the system.

You can change your password by choosing **My Account** from the menu on the left.

Now **My Desktop** window will open for you. All the applications to be reviewed are stored there.

NB! Some browsers block pop-up windows. As a lot of information in the ETIS will show up in separate windows, please check that your browser allows pop-up windows (see the instructions below¹).

Step 2. On **My Desktop** there is a **Contract of Services** that you can complete and submit. The contract will serve as the basis for remunerating your efforts (the ETAg will pay a fee of 100 € per each remote review and 100 € per each consensus report). By submitting the contract the contractor declares that he/she has read the Procedural Rules of the Conflict of Interest and fully understands its meaning and scope, and has no such interest in the results of the evaluation that could influence his/her impartiality.

After these steps you will have access to the materials related to the application.

Step 3. Open the application by clicking on it.

From the tab panel you can choose between

- **Application** (administrative form with abstract and Scientific explanation (as a link to a file)),
- **Personnel**
- **Budget**
- **Print** (you can print out different parts of the application by ticking the box in front of the document)
- **Review form**
please fill it in according to the evaluation criteria and the scoring scale provided under section 3 of this guide (THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EVALUATION PROCEDURE). Please

¹ **Checking pop-up windows**

If you use Internet Explorer you can find it under "Tools" -> "Internet Options" -> "Privacy" -> "Settings", now please enter www.etis.ee into the field "Address of website to allow"

If you use Mozilla FireFox you can find it under "Tools" -> "Options" -> "Content" -> after "Block pop-up windows" click on "Exceptions", please enter www.etis.ee into the field "Address of web site"

Now all pop-up windows should open. If you are still experiencing problems, please check if there are any other windows open on your desktop. Sometimes web-browsers are using non-active windows for pop-up's.

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also note the thresholds set for each criteria. Please give comments for every score to justify your opinion. Experts must take into account that strict limitation of the length of proposed project applied for points 1-4 of research plan (15000 characters including spaces).

- In case you have any problems with the electronic system, please contact our ETIS helpdesk etis@etaq.ee, or call +3727 300 373. In case of any major problems we can always send the materials by e-mail.

Editing and modifying of the individual evaluation forms is possible in the ETIS until the deadline set for the evaluators.

2.2. Consensus reports

Based on the three individual evaluations an evaluation summary report (**consensus report**) for each proposal will be written. The ETAg appoints one of the experts as the 'rapporteur' for the group of evaluators working on the same proposal, making him/her responsible for formulating a consensus report on the proposal.

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. Comments should be suitable for feedback to the proposal Project Promoter. Scores and comments are set out in the consensus report. If applicable, they also come to a common view on the questions on ethics.

2.2.1. How to use ETIS for preparing the consensus report

The consensus report should be prepared in ETIS following **Step 1.** under p. 2.1.2.

Rapporteur has access to the individual evaluations and to the consensus report form.

Consensus report form

Please fill it in according to the evaluation criteria and the scoring scale provided under p. 3 of this guide (THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EVALUATION PROCEDURE).

Please also note the threshold for each criterion. Only the proposals passing all thresholds in the consensus report will be considered for funding.

The outcome of the consensus step is the consensus report. In the ETIS, the consensus report will be available for the three experts involved in the evaluation of the relevant application, and it has to be approved by all the experts. Further guidelines for writing the consensus report will be provided to the experts. The scores may, but do not have to be the average of the remote evaluations scores.

The ETAg will assist the rapporteur in contacting the relevant experts. In case it is impossible to reach a consensus, the report sets out the majority view of the experts, but also records any dissenting views from any particular expert(s).

The ETAg will take the necessary steps to ensure the quality of the consensus reports, with particular attention given to clarity, consistency, and the appropriate level of detail. If changes are necessary, the reports will be referred back to the rapporteurs concerned.

Confirmation of the consensus report by the rapporteur in the ETIS completes the consensus step.

2.3. Programme Committee's evaluation meeting

Based on the consensus reports, the ETAg prepares and presents to the Programme Committee:

- a list of any proposals having been found ineligible during the evaluation;
- a list of evaluated proposals having failed one or more thresholds in the consensus report and not recommended for funding;
- a ranking list of proposals passing all thresholds in the consensus report and a summary of recommendations from the independent experts.

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The Programme Committee is presented with a list of proposals to be selected for funding by the ETAg, including the suggested financial contribution for each proposal (with a reserve list). The Programme Committee shall make the suggestion to the Programme Operator on the award of grants.

The Programme Operator should address any aspects that would need to be modified during negotiation, based on the advice of the experts. A number of proposals may be kept in reserve to allow for eventualities such as the failure of negotiations on projects, the withdrawal of proposals, budget savings agreed during negotiation, or the availability of additional budget from other sources.

Before the evaluation meeting, the members of the Programme Committee have to declare if they have conflict of interest with any submitted proposal. The criteria for conflict of interest are presented in Annex I. If a conflict of interest appears, the committee member should immediately inform the chairperson. **If a member of the Programme Committee has a conflict of interests with respect to an item on the agenda, the expert must declare this at the beginning of the meeting, remove himself or herself from discussions of such an item on the agenda and leave the meeting room for the time of discussion.**

The main task of the evaluation meeting of the Programme Committee is to decide about the final ranking order of the proposals on the basis of the consensus scores awarded to the projects.

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

- (i) proposals are prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the criterion "Scientific and/or technical excellence";
- (ii) proposals are prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the criterion "Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management, including added value from international cooperation", paying special attention to the quality and sustainability of the cooperation;
- (iii) relevance in relation to the priority areas of the Estonian RD&I Strategy;
- (iv) proposals submitted by the less represented gender among the higher ranked proposals are considered to have the priority.

The final ranking list is confirmed during the meeting of the Programme Committee.

Thus, the outcome of the evaluation meeting is a report entailing:

- a final report for each proposal, including explanatory statements and scores based on the consensus report. The final report for each financed proposal shall also include a recommended amount of grant following the evaluation. If the recommended grant is different from the grant requested by the applicant, an explanation shall be included (e.g. in case of mistakes in budget calculation, explanation should include recommendations as to which costs should be cut or increased).

3. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EVALUATION PROCEDURE

3.1. THE EVALUATION CRITERIA

The experts are invited to review the quality of the submitted proposals based on three core evaluation criteria. Evaluation scores will be awarded for each of the three criteria (according to the scoring scale; see section 3.2.). Each criterion will be scored on a 5-point scale. Half-point scores may be given. No weightings will apply.

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Scientific and/or technical excellence (score 0-5, threshold 3.5):

- sound concept, and quality of objectives
- progress beyond the state-of-the-art
- quality and effectiveness of the scientific methodology and associated work plan
- innovation and new approaches

Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management, including added value from international cooperation (score 0-5, threshold 4):

- appropriateness of the Project Promoter and project partners participating in the project
- appropriateness of the work plan
- appropriate allocation and justification of the resources to be committed (personnel, travel, subcontracting and other costs)
- appropriateness of the research environment for the proposed research
- researcher training
- international cooperation beyond the project, quality and sustainability of cooperation between the partners.

Potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results (score 0-5, threshold 3.5):

- relevance of the proposal in relation to the objectives of the Programme (see section 1 on page 1 of this Guide)
- impact of the project on research-based knowledge development in Estonia
- potential of the research topic to be internationally competitive
- take-up and use of the project results by end users, including the clarity, appropriateness and efficiency of the planned knowledge transfer measures

Total: 0-15, threshold 11.

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- with or without a link to other programmes (including other Norway/EEA Grants programmes).

Please note that these conditions (existing additional funding, number of partners, etc.) should not place any project automatically in a more favourable position compared to others in the evaluation process. No additional points will be added based on these conditions.

3.2. THE SCORING SCALE

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:

- 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.

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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.

The use of the whole scale is recommended, i.e. experts should not hesitate to score below “3 – good” when appropriate. Comments on every score to justify the opinion should be given.

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Annex I

PROCEDURAL RULES OF THE CONFLICT OF INTEREST

1. PREAMBLE

These rules set out the principles and procedures of the common action of the individual experts and members of the Programme Committee (hereinafter “the experts”) participating in the proposals evaluation and decision making process (hereinafter “the call process”).

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE RULES

The purpose of these rules is to ensure the objectivity and transparency of the call process and to guarantee an equal and fair treatment of the applicants.

3. PARTICIPATION IN THE CALL PROCESS

Experts are allowed to participate in the call process if they do not have any conflict of interest and keep the confidentiality as follows. If the expert is disqualified according to the criteria set out in Chapter 4, he/she cannot participate or otherwise assist in the call process as regards handling his/her own or intimate’s applications or competitors’ applications. It has to be ensured that none of the applicants has access to the competing proposals of others.

4. DISQUALIFYING AND POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The call process is based on the fundamental principles of transparency, objectivity and equality of treatment.

An expert shall be ***disqualified*** if he/she in any way benefits or will be disfavoured from the approval or rejection of a proposal in the call process. An expert shall also be disqualified in the following circumstances:

The expert:

- is participating or has been involved in the preparation of any proposal being evaluated or submitted under the call;
- stands to benefit directly should the proposal be accepted;
- has close research collaboration with the applicant (e.g. joint publications within the last three years (co-authors of publications where there are hundreds of authors may be considered as eligible experts), cooperation in the preparation of the application);
- has been a superior, subordinate or instructor of the applicant during the past three years;
- is a director or a member of the board, council or a corresponding governing body of an organisation which has submitted an application to the call;
- is in close family relationship with any person representing the applicant organisation in the proposal.

The expert is also disqualified if his/her impartiality may otherwise be endangered, or if he/she feels that there is a conflict of interest and therefore is disqualified to participate in the call process.

The expert has a ***potential conflict of interest*** if he/she:

- is employed by one of the applicant organisations in a proposal or has been so within the previous three years
- has been involved in a contract or research collaboration with an applicant organisation (e.g. joint publications) in the previous three years

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In these cases, as well as in any other situation that casts doubt or that could reasonably appear to do so, the disqualification is decided by the ETAg.

5. DUTY TO INFORM

The ETAg has to be informed of all cases of conflict of interest as soon as they are detected.

Experts are required to declare any personal interests according to the criteria listed above. Such information shall be disclosed before the relevant meeting is held.

If a hitherto unsuspected conflict of interest becomes apparent during the call process, the expert must inform the ETAg immediately. If the conflict is found to be a disqualifying one, the expert must abstain from further activities within the call process. Any comments and scores made earlier within the call process by that expert for the proposal concerned will be discounted.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

All material related to the call process, such as work plans, abstracts, summary reports and evaluation statements, are confidential documents. The documents should therefore be handled and stored with due care and confidentiality.

The experts are not allowed to disclose any information concerning the documents, evaluations, or discussions to outsiders, nor are they allowed to use this confidential information to their own benefit or anyone else's benefit or disadvantage. In addition, they may not reveal to outsiders that they are assessing the work plan of a particular researcher. Any specific questions about the call process, documents or evaluation statements addressed by persons with no authorisation to be involved in the call process should be forwarded to the ETAg.

Once the entire call process has been completed, the expert is required to destroy all the application documents and any copies made of them, or return them, unless regulated otherwise according to e.g. archiving rules of the funding organisation. Confidentiality must also be maintained after the call process has been completed.

7. DECISIONS CONCERNING EXPERTS DISQUALIFICATIONS

It is preferred that the experts individually by themselves will consider their conflict of interest to avoid possible conflicts during the call process. If needed, the ETAg decides on the presence or absence of conflict of interest and the further procedure as stated above.