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THE NORWEGIAN FINANCIAL MECHANISM
THE POLISH BASIC RESEARCH
PROGRAMME
A GUIDE FOR EVALUATORS
THE GRIEG CALL

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Guide for Evaluators describes in detail the evaluation process and defines the responsibilities of the experts in the GRIEG call. This document is based on the Guideline for Research Programmes – Rules for the establishment and implementation of programmes falling under the Programme Area “Research” and applies to the evaluation of the proposals submitted in the GRIEG call

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

2. ABOUT THE POLISH BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The overall objectives of the Norway Grants and EEA Grants are to contribute to the reduction of economic and social disparities in Europe and to strengthen bilateral relations between Poland and Donor States (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein).

The main objective of the Basic Research Programme implemented by the National Science Centre is enhanced research-based knowledge development through research cooperation between Poland and the Donor States. Basic research should be understood as “experimental or theoretical endeavours undertaken to gain new knowledge of the foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct commercial use”. Projects which generate new solutions or social innovations are warmly welcomed, but the project grants will not support activities such as commercialisation, development or enhancement of products or any other direct commercial use, etc.

The Programme is designed, through competitive and open calls for proposals for research projects, to ensure quality and a high level of research. During the Basic Research Programme period, three open calls are foreseen: GRIEG, IdeaLab and POLS. The Programme is organised in cooperation with the Research Council of Norway.

The GRIEG call will support bilateral research projects involving participants from Poland on the one side, and Norway on the other. The objective of this support is to foster long-term strategic partnerships and increased participation in Horizon Europe. An important objective of the GRIEG call is to strengthen human resources in research through the facilitation of international relations and involving PhD students and postdocs in the projects.

Expected results of the GRIEG call are:

- Internationally refereed joint publications in high-impact journals, in line with the programme’s open access policy;

- Involvement of young¹ researchers in the projects, in a way which supports their career development and skills: as work package or task leaders, carrying out the research needed for their PhD or on further career steps, etc.;
- Close cooperation between the Polish and Norwegian partners involved in projects with the aim for building cooperation for future activities (like joint applications to EU Horizon Europe);
- Knowledge transfer, sharing experiences and best practices;
- Enhancement of the collaboration between science and society, including the involvement of public organisations, NGOs or other public benefit organisations.

3. AREAS OF THE CALL

The GRIEG Call will support collaborative research projects in all areas of the fundamental sciences². Based on the provisions of the MoU between Poland and Norway, research groups within polar research and social science research are particularly invited to submit proposals to this call. Twenty-five research discipline-specific evaluation panels are grouped within the three main domains: HS – Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; NZ – Life Sciences; ST – Physical Sciences and Engineering. The applicant (Principal Investigator) should choose the main discipline panel. All panels are presented on the website: <https://www.ncn.gov.pl/finansowanie-nauki/panele-ncn?language=en>

¹ A young researcher is a person involved in scientific activities: a doctoral student or a university teacher without a doctoral degree, or a person who has had a doctoral degree for a period not exceeding 7 years.

² The list of 25 NCN panels determined by the Resolution of the Council of the National Science Centre (66/2018).

HS – Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences		NZ – Life Sciences		ST – Physical Sciences and Engineering	
HS1	Fundamental questions of human existence and the nature of reality	NZ1	Molecular biology, structural biology, biotechnology	ST1	Mathematics
				ST2	Fundamental constituents of matter
HS2	Culture and cultural production	NZ2	Genetics, genomics	ST3	Condensed matter physics
HS3	The study of the human past	NZ3	Cellular and developmental biology, molecular and cellular neurobiology	ST4	Physical and analytical chemical sciences
HS4	Individuals, institutions, markets	NZ4	Biology of tissues, organs and organisms	ST5	Materials and synthesis
HS5	Norms and governance	NZ5	Human and animal non-infectious diseases	ST6	Computer science and informatics
HS6	Human nature and human society	NZ6	Human and animal immunology and infection	ST7	Systems and communication engineering
		NZ7	Diagnostics tools, therapies and public health	ST8	Products and processes engineering
		NZ8	Evolutionary and environmental biology	ST9	Astronomy and space research
		NZ9	Fundamentals of applied life sciences and biotechnology	ST10	Earth system sciences

4. ELIGIBILITY CHECK

4.1 Eligibility of proposals

Proposals must fulfil all of the eligibility criteria if they are to be retained for evaluation. The NCN as the operator of the programme will carry out the eligibility check.

In order to be retained, the proposals must fulfil all of the following administrative eligibility criteria:

- 1) Proposals must be submitted by an eligible applicant (Project Promoter) – a research organisation specified in article 27, section 1, point 1, 3-6 of the Act on the National Science Centre established as a legal person in Poland;
- 2) Project partners (any public or private entity, commercial or non-commercial as well as non-governmental organisations) have to be established as a legal person in Poland or Norway;
- 3) Proposals must meet the criterion concerning the number of Participants – at least one Polish research organisation and one research entity from Norway;
- 4) Proposals must be submitted via the electronic proposal submission system ZSUN/OSF before the submission deadline of 17 September 2019, 24.00 CET;
- 5) The project implementation period is either 24 or 36 months;
- 6) The minimum grant amount is €500,000 and the maximum amount is €1,500,000. The exchange rate of the Polish National Bank on the day of the call announcement must be used to calculate whether the project budget in PLN is within the eligible limits;
- 7) Receipt of the proposal before the deadline date and time established in the call;
- 8) All fields of the proposal application form must be filled;
- 9) All administrative forms specified in the proposal application form must be present and duly signed by the person(s) authorised to enter into legally binding commitments on behalf of the applicant organisation. The Principal Investigator's declaration must be present and signed;
- 10) Proposals must comply with the language requirements set out in the proposal application form: all fields must be filled in English unless specifically indicated in the application form;
- 11) A statement that the project complies with the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, including accessibility for people with disabilities and the principle of equality between women and men must be signed;
- 12) A statement that the applicant and partners are not excluded from the possibility of receiving funding must be signed. (For more information, please consult section 3.5 of the [Guide for Applicants](#));
- 13) The content of the proposal must relate to the scope of the call.

5. EVALUATION PROCESS

5.1 General rules concerning the evaluation process

The evaluation process rests on a number of well-established principles:

- **Excellence** – the projects selected for funding must demonstrate high quality in the context of the key topics and criteria set out in the call.
- **Transparency** – the funding decisions must be based on clearly described rules and procedures, and applicants should receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals;
- **Fairness and impartiality** – all proposals submitted to the call are treated equally. They are evaluated impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants;

- **Confidentiality** – all proposals and related data, knowledge and documents communicated to PO are treated in confidence;
- **Efficiency and speed** – evaluation, award and contract preparation should be as rapid as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation, and respecting the legal framework;
- **Ethical and security considerations** – any proposal which contravenes fundamental ethical principles may be excluded at any time from the process of evaluation, selection and award.

5.2. Evaluation criteria

Each eligible proposal is evaluated with the following selection criteria:

Criteria	Score	Threshold	Weight
Criterion 0: Relevance in relation to the objectives and priorities of the Basic Research Programme	0-5	5	-
Criterion 1: Scientific excellence Sub-criteria to be taken into account during evaluation: 1.1 Evaluation of the scientific excellence of the proposal 1.2 Evaluation of the research track record of the Principal Investigator and the consortium partners	0-5	3/5	60%
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	0-5	3/5	20%
Criterion 3: Potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results	0-5	3/5	20%

In criterion 0, the main content of the proposal must be basic research, understood as “experimental or theoretical endeavours undertaken to gain new knowledge of the foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct commercial use”. The presence of elements of applied research activity does not lead to the disqualification of a proposal, as long as the main content is basic research. If the proposal fails the criterion of basic research, the experts will award the score 0 and write the justification. During the panel evaluation, proposals failing the criterion of basic research will be discussed and may be excluded from the evaluation. A justification of the assessment is provided to the applicant in the application system ZSUN/OSF. If the proposal is relevant, the experts will award the score 5.

In criterion 1, equal weight will be given for the sub-criteria. Evaluation of the track record has to be in relation to the stage of the career.

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Experts examine the issues to be considered comprising each evaluation criterion and score these on a scale from 0 to 5, with short comments. The experts are expected to use the entire range of scores detailed below. The individual scoring and expert's comments provided in the justification will be further discussed during the panel of experts meeting.

Score values indicate the following assessments:

0 – The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information

1 – Poor. The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

2 – Fair. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but 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. Any shortcomings are minor.

5.3. Stages of the evaluation process

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

- 1) National Science Centre (NCN) as the Programme Operator checks the proposals against the eligibility criteria listed in the Guidelines for Applicants.
- 2) Each eligible proposal is sent to three independent international experts (with at least a doctoral degree) based on their closest possible competence in relation to the topic of the proposal and expertise necessary to cover the evaluation criteria set. International experts must be resident and working outside Poland and Norway.
- 3) Each expert examines the received proposals individually and submits an evaluation report on each proposal separately through the online submission system ZSUN/OSF 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 conflict of interest rules. The evaluation is done by the expert alone.
- 4) All experts are invited to NCN (Kraków, Poland) for the next evaluation stage. First, the three experts who read each proposal, meet to discuss and to prepare consensus reports, representing their common view. Each expert has access to the scores and comments in the ZSUN/OSF online system. A rapporteur is appointed from among the 3 experts by the NCN coordinator(s). The task of the rapporteur will be to draft the consensus report with the support of the NCN coordinator. The rapporteur will be responsible for presenting the consensus report during the panel discussion.
- 5) After discussions between experts, the agreed scores and comments are set out in the consensus report. In the event that it is impossible to reach a consensus, the report sets the experts' majority view but also records any dissenting views. The Coordinators of the National Science Centre take part in the consensus meeting and take the necessary

steps to assure the quality of the consensus reports. The signing of the consensus report completes the consensus step of the panel meeting.

- 6) NCN organises three panels composed of the international experts active in the consensus step, one for each research domain (HS – Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; NZ – Life Sciences; ST – Physical Sciences and Engineering).
- 7) The panel evaluation is the final step involving international experts. The panel review entails a comparison of the consensus reports, checking the consistency of the scores and justifications, resolving cases where the experts could not reach consensus concerning a particular aspect of a proposal and recommending a priority order for proposals with the same score. The panel review culminates with a panel report containing:
 - an Evaluation Summary Report for each proposal;
 - list of proposals found ineligible during evaluation;
 - list of proposals passing all thresholds;
 - list of evaluated proposals having failed one or more thresholds;
 - recommendations for priority order;
 - recommendations for proposals passing to final evaluation;
 - a summary of any other recommendations of the panel.

Based on the outcome of the panel meetings, the Coordinators of the National Science Centre prepare preliminary ranking lists, one for each research domain (HS – Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, NZ – Life Sciences, ST – Physical Sciences and Engineering) with a requested grant amount for each proposal. The proposals representing polar research and social sciences will be clearly marked on the preliminary ranking lists.

5.4 Roles in the evaluation process

5.4.1 Role and tasks of experts

The proposals are evaluated by panels composed of internationally recognized experts. The pool of experts is established by the Coordinators of the National Science Centre in cooperation with the RCN. Experts are recruited by using the expert identification tools (Elsevier's Experts Lookup, Publons Reviewer Connect, etc.) and from the National Science Centre's existing database of international experts having experience in evaluating project proposals at international level. The NCN (Programme Operator) draws up a list of appropriate experts using as main selection criteria their high level of expertise and their appropriate range of competencies.

The experts are kindly asked to:

- read the Call document, Guide for Applicants and Guide for Evaluators;
- sign in advance the Contract for evaluating proposals and final reports submitted to the National Science Centre;
- read the assigned proposals;

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- complete and submit the evaluation form for each assigned proposal, providing comments and individual scoring for the proposals;
- participate in consensus/panel discussions for all the projects assigned;
- advise the Programme Operator of disqualifying or potential conflicts of interests;
- not disclose the proposals assigned for their evaluation to third parties.

The identities of the experts are not disclosed to the Applicants.

Please note that the reviews are sent to the Applicants in an unchanged form, identical to the original review prepared by the experts. Hence, the final review has to meet high standards in terms of merit, completeness, unambiguity and format.

5.4.2 Role and tasks of NCN Coordinators

National Science Centre Scientific Coordinators are scientific officers selected by the National Science Centre Council on the basis of competition. They must have at least a PhD. Coordinators work within the NCN in three units:

- the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Coordinator Unit,
- the Life Sciences Coordinator Unit,
- the Physical Sciences and Engineering Unit.

The NCN Coordinators oversee the evaluation process and are responsible for the impartiality of the peer review process. Their tasks include:

- - finding experts
- - allocating experts to proposals
- - organize and take part in consensus meetings
- - organize and facilitate the panel meetings
- - prepare ranking lists

5.5 Evaluation meeting of the Programme Committee

Prior to the Programme Committee meeting, as the Programme Operator, NCN will provide access for the Programme Committee members to evaluated proposals, individual reviews, consensus reports, panel reports and the preliminary ranking lists.

The task of the Programme Committee is to decide on the final ranking order of the proposals on the basis of the total consensus scores assigned to the projects and the panel reports. The Programme Committee may decide to add a maximum of one additional point per project in cases where:

- the project is led by a researcher at an early stage of her/his career;
- the project is led by a female researcher in scientific areas where women are under-represented and vice-versa.

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While making a recommendation for funding, the Programme Committee takes into consideration: a) the quality of the proposals; b) a similar success rate for each research domain; and c) the overall portfolio of the programme, including the provision of the MoU to support polar research and social sciences, and the total budget for the call.

In the event that the final ranking list, approved by the Programme Committee, reveals that limitations in the amount of funding prevent the full inclusion of another project into the final list, the Programme Operator may, acting on a proposal from the Programme Committee, apply budget cuts uniformly across all projects, not exceeding 3% of the requested budget.

5.6. Funding decisions

The Programme Operator issues individual decisions to award a grant to projects based on the final ranking lists approved by the Programme Committee, for those projects for which grants are available. The decisions of the Director of the National Science Centre are submitted to the Project Promoter and to the Principal Investigator. The decision of the Director may be appealed against to the Appeal Committee of the Council of the National Science Centre.

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 the negotiation, or the availability of additional budget from other sources.

The lists of selected projects are published on the Programme Operator website.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Experts sign a contract in advance with the Programme Operator (NCN), which includes a statement on confidentiality and conflict of interest.

6.1 Confidentiality

All research plans and evaluation statements are confidential documents. Application documents should, therefore, be handled with care and treated as confidential before, during and after the evaluation process. Experts must not disclose any information concerning application documents or evaluations to outsiders, nor should they use confidential information to their own or any other party's benefit or disadvantage.

Experts must not communicate with applicants on topics related to applications.

The experts will be held personally responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any documents or electronic files sent, and for returning, erasing or destroying all confidential documents or files upon completing the evaluation as instructed.

Experts may not show the contents of proposals or information on applicants to third parties.

6.2 Conflict of interest

Experts are excluded from evaluating an application submitted under the GRIEG call if:

- they are a collaborator of the principal investigator and/or other partners named in the GRIEG grant application or of the host entity submitting the application, or of the

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entity/entities employing research partners;

- they have been involved, to whatever extent, in drafting the proposal;
- they can draw direct benefits from recommending the application for funding;
- they have close relations (they are a spouse, ancestor, descendant or sibling) with the principal investigator and/or other research partners named in the GRIEG grant application or representatives of the entity/entities applying for funding;
- they are or were in the past three years employed by the entity/entities employing the principal investigator and/or other partners named in the GRIEG grant application;
- another important circumstance occurs that may undermine their reliability and impartiality.

The above cases do not exhaust all possibilities for conflict of interest. If in doubt, the expert should contact a relevant Scientific Coordinator, advising of the conflict of interest or bias. However, if the expert is of the opinion that the existing conflict of interest would lead to a biased evaluation, the expert should withdraw from the assessment unconditionally.

7. CONTACT PERSON

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