

**CZECH-NORWEGIAN RESEARCH PROGRAMME**  
**GUIDE FOR EVALUATORS**

Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014  
Norway Grants

Approved by the Programme Committee on 7 August, 2013

*Annex 1 Individual Review Form*

*Annex 2 Consensus Report Form*

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The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (hereinafter “the Ministry”) as the Programme Operator of the Czech-Norwegian Research Programme (hereinafter “the Programme”) has prepared this Guide for Evaluators in accordance with the *Regulation on the Implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014* (hereinafter “the Regulation”) and *Annex 12 – Rules for the establishment and implementation of donor partnership programmes falling under the Programme Areas “Research within Priority sectors” and “Bilateral Research Cooperation”*.

## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

### 1.1. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The Programme’s goal is to enhance science and research cooperation between Czech and Norwegian entities and fund the creation of new scientific knowledge and quality outputs through bilateral projects in basic and applied research and experimental development.

### 1.2. PROGRAMME THEMATIC AREAS

The Programme funds collaborative projects in the following areas of research:

- **Social Sciences and Humanities;**
- **Environment; and**
- **Health.**

Interdisciplinary projects are also supported.

### 1.3. PROGRAMME CONDITIONS

The Programme is open to projects:

- with or without additional funding from other sources;
- with different kinds 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 EEA/Norway Grants programmes).

#### Note:

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

## 1.4. SUPPORTED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Fundamental research, industrial research and experimental development as defined by the Community Framework for Research and Development and Innovation (2006/C 323/01) are the research categories supported under the Programme.

## 1.5. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Project Partners from the Czech Republic and Norway have to be research organisations as defined in Article 2.2. letter (d) of the Community Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation (2006/C 232/01) or small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as defined in Article 2.2. letter (a) of the Community Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation (2006/C 232/01).

At least one eligible Czech participant and one eligible Norwegian participant must take part in each project.

## 2. EVALUATION PROCESS

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

- a) **Excellence;** Projects selected for funding must demonstrate a high quality in the context of the topics and criteria set out in the Call.
- b) **Transparency;** 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.
- c) **Fairness and impartiality;** All proposals submitted to a Call are treated equally. They are evaluated impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants.
- d) **Confidentiality;** All proposals and related data, knowledge and documents communicated to the Programme Operator are treated in confidence.
- e) **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.
- f) **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. The provision of false information as well as plagiarism will result in a rejection of the proposal.

## 2.1. ELIGIBILITY OF PROPOSALS

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

- Proposals must be submitted by an eligible entity according to the Programme.
- Proposals must be submitted before the deadline.
- Project Promoters and Project partners must be entities eligible according to the Programme.
- Proposals must meet the criterion concerning the number of participants (at least one entity from the Czech Republic and one from Norway).
- Proposals must be completed (i.e. all of the requested components and forms must be included). Proposals must respect the requested format and be submitted in the manner specified in the Call.

**Eligibility check is carried out by the Ministry.**

## 2.2. EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

The evaluation of proposals is carried out in full accordance with Annex 12 of the Regulation. The Ministry evaluates eligible proposals with assistance of at least three external independent experts.

### 2.2.1 Conflict of interest

Experts are required to confirm that they have no conflict of interest for each proposal they are asked to evaluate.

A potential conflict of interest may arise if a person:

- was involved in the preparation of the proposal,
- has had personal, business or other relation with the applicant that could influence the evaluation,
- could benefit directly should the proposal be accepted,
- was employed by one of the applicant organisations stated in a proposal within the previous three years,
- is involved in a contract or research collaboration with an applicant organisation, or has been so in the previous three 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.

### 2.2.2 Proposal scoring

Experts examine the issues to be considered comprising each evaluation criterion (excellence, objectives, management and impact), 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.
- 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 should be given to justify every score.

### 2.2.3 Thresholds

Thresholds for all of the criteria are set. Proposals failing to achieve the set threshold score for one or more criteria will be rejected.

### 2.2.4 Description of proposal evaluation

The Ministry briefs the experts in writing on the evaluation process and procedures as well as the selection criteria to be applied. The core information of the appointment letter is the content of this guide and the confidentiality agreement. It also specifies the description of work, associated deadlines and condition of payment.

#### 2.2.4.1 Individual evaluation of proposals

In the initial phase of the evaluation each expert works individually, and gives scores and comments for each criterion.

Experts also indicate if the proposal:

- is coherent with one of the thematic areas of the Programme or can be regarded as an interdisciplinary project; and

- deals with sensitive ethical issues.

As a result of the individual evaluation of the proposal, the expert completes an **Individual Review Form** (Annex 1 of the Guide), specifying comments and scoring of the proposal. If a proposal is considered to be out of scope by all individual experts, it will be considered to be ineligible.

#### 2.2.4.2 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, representing their common views on the specific evaluated proposal. Comments should be suitable for feedback to the Project Promoter. Scores and comments are set out in a **Consensus Report Form** (Annex 2 of the Guide). If applicable, the experts also come to a common view on the questions of scope and ethics, as mentioned above.

One of the three experts is assigned by the Ministry as a **reporter**, responsible for preparing the Consensus Report Form.

If during the consensus discussion it is impossible to bring all the experts to a common point of view on any particular aspect of the proposal, the Ministry may ask additional experts to evaluate the proposal.

The outcome of the consensus step is the Consensus Report Form, approved and signed by all the 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 Ministry takes the necessary steps to assure the quality of the Consensus Report Forms, with particular attention given to clarity, consistency, and an appropriate level of detail. If important changes are necessary, the reports are referred back to the experts concerned.

The signing of the Consensus report by all three experts completes the consensus step.

### 2.3. EVALUATION AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Reviewers are requested to evaluate the proposals according to the selection criteria specified in Annex 12 of the Regulation.

The criteria are shown in the following table:

**Table 1: Selection criteria of Call**

| Criteria                                                                          | Description                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Relevance in relation to the objectives and prioritised areas of the Programme | 1.1 Coherence with programme thematic areas          |
| 2. Scientific and/or technical excellence                                         | 2.1 Innovativeness of the idea                       |
|                                                                                   | 2.2 Appropriateness of the approach                  |
| 3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management                    | 3.1 Competence and expertise of the applicant team   |
|                                                                                   | 3.2 Feasibility and efficiency of the project plan   |
| 4. Potential impact of the project                                                | 4.1 Contribution to capacity and competence building |
|                                                                                   | 4.2 Intended short-term outcomes                     |
|                                                                                   | 4.3 Intended long-term outcomes                      |

All proposals are assessed if they **fall within programme thematic areas** as presented in 1.1 above or can be regarded as interdisciplinary. If a proposal is not coherent with the programme themes, it will be rejected from further evaluation.

### **2.3.1 Relevance in relation to the objectives and prioritised areas of the Programme**

This criterion is considered an elimination criterion. The project proposal should be assessed if it fits the Call topics; that is, if it corresponds to the research areas and objectives of the Programme. If the answer is “no”, the project is rejected and there is no need for further evaluation. Please note that the answer “no” should be given only in clear cases. If it is unclear whether the proposal falls within the thematic areas, reviewers should write their comments, evaluate the proposal and leave it for the consensus stage to make a final decision on this matter.

### **2.3.2 Scientific and/or technical excellence**

The scientific quality and/or technical excellence of the research and development is an important criterion in evaluating the proposal. The following aspects will be evaluated:

- Innovativeness of idea - originality of project idea, ambition and challenge to address scientific or technological problems of current interests;
- Appropriateness of approach - methods proposed have to be sound, rigorous, state-of-the-art and appropriate to the proposed activities, proposed goals should be achieved using a methodology/approach presenting the level of risk that is inherent in a challenging research and development project.

### **2.3.3 Quality and efficiency of implementation and management**

The quality and efficiency of the implementation and management are an important criterion in evaluating the proposal. The following aspects will be evaluated:

- Competence and expertise of the applicant team - Project Promoter's knowledge and experience in the field of research and development and his/her general qualifications to lead the project, relevance and strengths of partners (including resources and infrastructure), quality of previous work of the project team involved and the level of previous and current (financial) support in the field;
- Feasibility and efficiency of the project plan - schedule and milestones, compatible with resources, either available or requested, appropriateness of human resources (number of personnel and their qualifications) per partner, appropriateness of budget with respect to planned work.

Projects should be ambitious and feasible at the same time. The project plan has to be evaluated according to the level of competence of the project team and the efficiency of the work plan.

Moreover, the proposals must make clear why they should be developed cooperatively between participating countries/institutions and what added value will be created through this collaboration. It is expected that the collaborations developed between Czech and Norwegian entities will deliver significant synergy effects.

The project's budget should reflect the actual contribution made by each party and should be subject to negotiation between the Project Promoter and the Project Partner. Should the division of the budget be significantly unbalanced, this must be explained and justified.

### **2.3.4 Potential impact of the project**

The potential impact of research and development activities is an important criterion in evaluating the proposal. The following aspects will be taken into account:

- Contribution to capacity and competence building - how the project will build experience and competence of the researchers/organisations involved;
- Intended short-term outcomes – ambition and balance of acquisition of expertise, actual research work and dissemination of results, dissemination of results among the potential users;
- Intended long-term outcomes – planned strategies for disseminating and using results during and after the project as well as a description of how potential users are to be involved in the project in view of using the results, i.e. exploitation of intellectual property generated, technical innovations, spin-offs, raising scientific

awareness, improvement of quality of life; intended technical, economic, environmental and societal impacts.

## 2.4. THRESHOLDS

The proposal can receive a maximum number of 15 points in the evaluation procedure. To be recommended for funding, **the proposal must pass all the thresholds** presented in the table below.

**Table 2: Thresholds**

| Criteria                                                                          | Thresholds     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Relevance in relation to the objectives and prioritised areas of the Programme | YES            |
| 2. Scientific and/or technical excellence                                         | 3,5 (out of 5) |
| 3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management                    | 3,0 (out of 5) |
| 4. Potential impact of the project                                                | 3,5 (out of 5) |

**Note: No weighting is applied.**

## 2.5. FINALISATION OF RESULTS

Based on the evaluation outcomes (evaluation by experts and list of proposals passing all thresholds), the Ministry staff draws up a ranking list of the proposals submitted under the Call to be discussed and recommended by the Programme Committee. The Ministry makes its own assessment of the proposals, in particular a review of the Ministry's financial contribution. There will be only **one ranking list** of proposals submitted, covering all the thematic areas as well as proposals of interdisciplinary projects.

### 2.5.1 Ranking

Proposals are ranked according to the evaluation results. Funding decisions are made on the basis of this ranking.

The Ministry draws up a list of proposals for possible funding from those that passed the evaluation thresholds, on the basis of the results of the evaluation by experts in the Consensus report. Due account is taken of the scores received and of any advice from the experts. A suggested grant amount is determined for each of these proposals.

### 2.5.2 Programme Committee evaluation meeting

The Programme Committee has been established by the Ministry, and it consists of five members representing the Czech Republic and Norway. The Rules of procedure and the

current composition can be found at <http://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum-a-vyvoj/programovy-vybor-a-jeho-uloha-v-cesko-norskem-vyzkumnem>.

Based on the Consensus Report Forms, the Ministry prepares and presents to the Programme Committee:

- a) a list of any proposals having been found ineligible during the eligibility check or evaluation;
- b) a list of evaluated proposals having failed one or more thresholds in the Consensus Report Form;
- c) a ranking list of proposals passing all thresholds in the Consensus report and a summary of recommendations from the independent experts;
- d) Individual Review Forms and the Consensus Report Form for each project proposal and a list of experts carrying out the evaluations.

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

The Ministry should address financial 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 in case of budget savings agreed during negotiation of initially selected projects or the availability of additional funding from other sources.

Before the evaluation meeting, the members of the Programme Committee must declare if they have a conflict of interest with any submitted proposal. The criteria for conflict of interest are presented in 2.2.1 above. If a conflict of interest arises, the Committee member should immediately inform the chairperson. If a member of the Programme Committee has a conflict of interest with respect to an item on the agenda, the member must declare this at the beginning of the meeting, remove him- or herself from discussions of this item on the agenda and leave the meeting room at the time of discussion. A vice-member may replace the member declaring a conflict of interest for this specific agenda item.

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

The Programme Committee takes into due account the available budget, the strategic objectives of the Programme, as well as the overall balance of proposals to be funded.

## 2.6. REJECTION DECISIONS

The Ministry formally decides to reject those proposals found to be ineligible, failing any of the thresholds for evaluation criteria, and those that, because they fall below a certain ranking, cannot be funded because the available budget is insufficient. The Ministry bases its decision on the Programme Committee recommendation.

## 2.7. FEEDBACK TO APPLICANTS

Feedback to applicants will be given in the form of a letter (**“initial information letter”**) sent electronically or through regular mail.

Project Promoters of proposals found to be ineligible will be informed of the grounds for such a decision.

After a rejection decision, Project Promoters of rejected proposals are informed in writing of the Ministry’s decision. The letter informing them also includes an explanation of the reasons for rejection in the form of an Evaluation summary report. On request the applicants will be sent the individual assessment forms and the consensus assessment form excluding the names of evaluators.

The deadline for dispatching these letters will be specified in the Guide for Applicants.

### **Suggestions for writing evaluations:**

- The assessment should be more than just scores, they also need proper justification.
- The assessment should indicate the most important strengths and weaknesses of the project proposal.
- The overall scoring should match the comments – otherwise the applicants might not have confidence in the assessment.
- Generalists in the field should be able to understand the recommendation.
- Bias in favour of reviewers’ own specialisation should be avoided.
- Balanced feedback and constructive criticism should be given.
- Assessments would be carried out against the highest international standards.

## 3. NEGOTIATION OF PROPOSALS

The Project Promoters of proposals that have not been rejected, and for which funding is available, are invited to begin negotiations. The negotiation may only concern financial aspects of the proposals.

The financial aspects should cover the establishment of the financial contribution, up to a set maximum, the amount of the advance payments in each budgetary year, the estimated breakdown of the budget and financial contribution per activity and per participant, and the

financial assessment of the financial capacity of the Project Promoter and any other participants if needed.

If it turns out to be impossible to reach an agreement with the Project Promoter within three weeks, the Ministry regards the negotiation terminated and rejects the proposal.

#### 4. AWARD OF GRANT

The Ministry completes its internal procedures, the procedures for consulting the Programme Committee and adopts the respective selection decision. The deadline for this decision is specified in the Guide for Applicants.

The list of projects selected for a grant, including the identification of the Project Promoter, Project Partner(s), principal investigator, acronym, the grant assistance from the Programme and the total eligible cost of the project will be made public on the web site of the Ministry and the Research Council of Norway.