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

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GLOSSARY

Project Promoter = Applicant = Host Institution

Principal Investigator (PI) = the incoming researcher planning to implement a research project at a Polish Host Institution under the POLS call

Programme Operator = National Science Centre (NCN), Poland

ZSUN/OSF = electronic submission system (Integrated System of Services for Science/Service Financing Streams): <https://osf.opi.org.pl>

Call edition = NCN calls in which proposals are submitted by the same date

Regulation = [Regulation on the implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021](#)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Guide for Evaluators describes in detail the evaluation process and defines the responsibilities of the experts in the POLS 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 POLS call

The Guide for Evaluators complements the [POLS call announcement](#) and the [Guide for Applicants](#). Both applicants and evaluators are kindly asked to familiarise themselves with the procedures described herein.

2. ABOUT THE 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 in Poland. 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 were announced: GRIEG, IdeaLab and POLS. The Programme is organised in cooperation with the Research Council of Norway.

3. ABOUT THE POLS CALL

The POLS call will support research projects led by incoming researchers of any nationality, including Polish who wish to pursue their projects in affiliation with and based at a Polish research organisation or company in any academic field, fostering international mobility, increasing the internationalisation of the research arena in Poland and providing an important step for future collaborative projects on the European level, with increasing participation in Horizon Europe.

Expected results of the POLS call are:

- Peer reviewed scientific publications with international outreach in line with the programme's open access policy¹;
- Knowledge transfer, sharing experience and best practices;
- Increasing the internationalisation of the research arena in Poland;
- Increasing the potential of the PI and host institutions to successfully apply for international funding, including the ERC grants;
- Development of the capacity of Polish research institutions to host incoming researchers.

The POLS call will support research projects in all areas of basic research.² Based on the provisions of the MoU between Poland and Norway, scientists working 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 in the three main domains: HS – Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; NZ – Life Sciences; ST – Physical Sciences and Engineering. The applicant should choose the main discipline panel. All panels are presented on the website: <https://www.ncn.gov.pl/finansowanie-nauki/panele-ncn?language=en>

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	ST4	Chemistry
HS4	Individuals, institutions, markets	NZ4	Biology of tissues, organs and organisms	ST5	Materials

¹ <https://www.coalition-s.org/>

² The list of 25 NCN panels determined by the Resolution of the Council of the National Science Centre (87/2019).

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	Production and processes engineering
		NZ8	Evolutionary and environmental biology	ST9	Astronomy and space science
		NZ9	Fundamentals of applied life sciences and biotechnology	ST10	Earth science

4. ELIGIBILITY CHECK

The proposals must fulfil all of the following administrative eligibility criteria:

- 1) Proposals must be submitted by an eligible applicant (Project Promoter). The list of eligible applicants is specified in section 3.2. of the [Guide for Applicants](#).
- 2) The PI must have a PhD degree. At the stage of proposal submission, the PI declares if he or she holds a PhD degree.
- 3) The PI must meet the requirement of not residing and not carrying out his or her main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Poland for at least 24 months prior to the call deadline (June 16, 2020), unless as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention. At the stage of proposal submission, the PI declares if he or she has resided and carried out his or her main activity outside Poland.
- 4) The PI must meet the requirement of not having the role of PI in research projects carried out in Poland (including projects funded by the NCN) for 24 months before the call deadline. At the stage of proposal submission, the PI declares if he or she hasn't had the role of PI in such projects.
- 5) Proposals must be submitted via the electronic proposal submission system ZSUN/OSF before the submission deadline of 16 June 2020, 16.00 CEST.
- 6) The project implementation period is either 12 or 24 months.
- 7) The minimum grant amount is €100,000 and the maximum amount is €200,000. The exchange rate of the Polish National Bank on the day of the call announcement must be used to calculate if the project budget in PLN is within the eligible limits.
- 8) All fields of the proposal application form must be completed, unless explicitly described in the ZSUN/OSF proposal application form as optional.

- 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 Project Promoter. The PI's declarations 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 otherwise in the application form.
- 11) A statement that the project complies with the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination must be present, including accessibility for people with disabilities and the principle of equality between women and men must be signed.
- 12) A statement that the Project Promoter is not excluded from the possibility of receiving funding must be signed. (For more information, please consult section 3.3 of the [Guide for Applicants](#)).
- 13) The content of the proposal must relate to the scope of the call (basic research may only be funded under the POLS call).

Please note that the quality of the information in the proposal will be evaluated by the experts; the eligibility checks only apply to the presence of the appropriate parts of the proposal. If one or more of the eligibility criteria have not been met, the proposal is declared ineligible and withdrawn from further evaluation. A proposal may be declared ineligible and withdrawn from further evaluation on every stage of the evaluation process. In such case, the NCN Director issues an individual administrative decision which is submitted to the Project Promoter. The reasons for rejection are available in the ZSUN/OSF system. A decision by the Director may be appealed against within 14 days from the date of receiving the decision to the Appeal Committee of the Council of the NCN, Poland.

5. EVALUATION PROCESS

5.1 General rules concerning the evaluation process

The evaluation process is based on the following principles:

- **Excellence** – the projects selected for funding must demonstrate high quality; in the context of the criteria set out in the call;
- **Transparency** – the funding decisions are based on clearly described rules and procedures, and the 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 merit, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants;
- **Confidentiality** – all proposals and related data, knowledge and documents communicated to the Programme Operator 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 will be excluded at any time from the process of evaluation, selection and award.

5.2 Evaluation process - overview

The evaluation process consists of the following steps:

1. individual evaluation by 3 experts, based on the information provided in the proposal about the PI, his or her academic and research career, publication record, previously funded research projects, research achievements, research experience, prizes and awards and the short description containing the proposed work plan;
2. threshold check performed by the NCN coordinators;
3. individual evaluation by 3 experts of the proposals that pass the threshold, based on all the information included in the proposal;
4. consensus assessment;
5. expert panel review and
6. Programme Committee selection meeting.

5.3 Individual evaluation

Each eligible proposal will be evaluated by three international experts. The experts will first independently evaluate the proposals individually online. Their evaluation will be based on the information provided in the proposal about the PI: his or her academic and research career, publication record, previously funded research projects, research achievements, research experience, prizes and awards and the short description containing the proposed work plan.

At this stage each eligible proposal is evaluated based on the following selection criteria:

Criteria	Score	Threshold	Weight
Criterion 0: Relevance in relation to the objectives and priorities of the Basic Research Programme	Yes/No	Yes	-
Criterion 1: <i>Quality of the work plan</i>	0-5	2/5	50%
Criterion 2: <i>Evaluation of the academic and research track record of the Principal Investigator</i>	0-5	2/5	50%

Criterion 0: Relevance in relation to the objectives and priorities of the Basic Research Programme – Yes/No, threshold Yes received from 2 out of 3 experts

The main content of the proposal, which at this stage is assessed based on the work plan only, 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. Projects which generate new solutions or social innovations are encouraged, but the project grants will not support activities such as commercialisation, development or enhancement of products or any other direct commercial use.

If 2 out of 3 experts answer No in Criterion 0, the proposal does not meet the criterion of basic research and will fall under the threshold. The experts need to provide a justification for criterion 0 only if they answer ‘No’.

For criteria 1 and 2 experts award scores on a scale from 0 to 5. Score values in criteria 1 and 2 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.

In addition to the scores, the experts provide comments for criteria 1 and 2. Each expert submits an evaluation report on each proposal separately through the online submission system ZSUN/OSF by a given deadline. The justification of the assessment is provided to the applicant in the application system ZSUN/OSF or with the Director’s decision.

5.4 Threshold check

When the individual evaluation by the experts is completed, the NCN coordinators will perform the threshold check. Proposals approved for the next stage of the evaluation must meet the following conditions:

- obtaining ‘Yes’ for criterion 0 from at least 2 experts;
- receiving at least 2 points out of 5 in each criterion and a total score of 60% (out of 100%), both counted as the arithmetic mean of the scores awarded by the 3 experts.

5.5. Individual review of full proposals

Proposals that pass the threshold will be evaluated independently online by 3 experts on the basis of all the information included in the applications. For criterion 0, the experts answer Yes/No and for criteria 1 - 3 award scores on a scale from 0 to 5. In addition to the scores, the experts provide comments for criteria 1 - 3. The experts need to provide a justification for criterion 0 only if they answer No. Each expert submits an evaluation report on each proposal separately through the online submission system ZSUN/OSF by a given deadline.

At this stage each eligible proposal is evaluated with the following selection criteria:

Criteria	Score	Weight
Criterion 0: Relevance in relation to the objectives and priorities of the Basic Research Programme	Yes/No	-
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, including his/her potential to successfully apply for international projects including the ERC grants	0-5	50%
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 Sub-criteria to be taken into account during evaluation: <i>2.1 Evaluation of the appropriateness of the host institution for the proposed research project and the PI's future career development, benefit of the collaboration both for the PI and the host institution.</i> <i>2.2 Sustainability of the collaboration between the host institution and the PI</i>	0-5	30%
Criterion 3: Potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results	0-5	20%

Criterion 0: Relevance in relation to the objectives and priorities of the Basic Research Programme – Yes/No, threshold Yes received from 2 out of 3 experts.

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. Projects which generate new solutions or social innovations are encouraged, but the project grants will not support activities such as commercialisation, development or enhancement of products or any other direct commercial use, etc.

If 2 out of 3 experts answer 'No' in Criterion 0, the proposal does not meet the criterion of basic research and will fall under the threshold. A justification of the assessment is provided in the application system ZSUN/OSF.

Criterion 1: Scientific excellence, max. 5 points, weighting 50%

Sub-criterion 1. Evaluation of the scientific excellence of the proposal

Sub-criterion 2. Evaluation of the research track record of the Principal Investigator, including his/her potential to successfully apply for international projects including the ERC grants

Equal weight will be given to each sub-criterion.

Criterion 2: Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management, including quality and implementation capacity of the applicant and contribution to capacity and competence building – max. 5 points, weighting 30%

Sub-criterion 1. Evaluation of the appropriateness of the host institution for the proposed research project and the PI's future career development, benefit of the collaboration both for the PI and the host institution.

Sub-criterion 2. Sustainability of the collaboration between the host institution and the PI

Equal weight will be given to each sub-criterion.

Criterion 3: Potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results – max. 5 points, weighing 20%

Experts examine the issues to be considered for evaluation criteria 1 - 3 and score these on a scale from 0 to 5.

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.

The justification of the assessment is provided to the applicant in the application system ZSUN/OSF or with the Director's decision.

5.6 Consensus assessment

Once all the experts have completed their individual assessments online, they meet to compare and discuss their assessment with the objective of establishing a consensus report, representing the shared view of the three experts. In the event that it is impossible to reach a consensus, the report sets out the experts' majority view, but also records any dissenting views. The NCN Coordinators are present during 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 evaluation. Results of the consensus assessment with justification are provided to the applicant in the application system ZSUN/OSF or with the Director's decision.

5.7 Panel review

All experts, who performed the independent review of full proposals, are invited to NCN (Kraków, Poland) for the panel meeting. Proposals will be evaluated within three panels: the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Panel (HS); the Life Sciences Panel (NZ); and the Physical Sciences and Engineering Panel (ST). The panels shall consist of the international experts who prepared the individual evaluation and consensus reports in the preceding steps. The panel meeting will entail a discussion of the quality of the proposal in the light of the individual reviews and consensus reports and comparison to other proposals. The panel will reach consensus regarding the final evaluation of each of the proposals. 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. A rapporteur will be chosen by the NCN coordinator(s) from among the 3 experts evaluating a proposal. The task of the rapporteur will be to draft the consensus report with the support of the NCN coordinator. The panel will recommend a ranking list of the proposals, recommending a priority order for proposals with the same score. The outcome of the panel review will be 3 panel reports, prepared by each of the panels and comprising:

- an Evaluation Summary Report for each proposal, including any recommendations for proposals passing to final evaluation;
- a list of proposals found ineligible during evaluation;
- a list of proposals passing the threshold check;
- a list of evaluated proposals having failed one or more criteria of the threshold check;
- recommendations for priority order (ranking lists);
- a summary of any other recommendations of the panels.

Results of the panel assessment with justification are provided to the applicant in the application system ZSUN/OSF or with the Director's decision.

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.

6. ROLES IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS

6.1 Role and tasks of experts

The proposals will be evaluated by panels composed of internationally recognised experts. The experts will be invited to evaluate the proposals that are related to their field of expertise. They must be resident and working outside Poland and Norway.

The experts will be chosen by the Council of National Science Centre. Experts will be selected on the basis of their expertise and experience in evaluating project proposals at international level.

NCN as the 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.

NCN will, whenever possible, take into account the need for gender balance among the experts.

The experts are kindly asked to:

- read the [Call document](#), [Guide for Applicants](#) and [Guide for Evaluators](#);
- sign an agreement concerning the evaluation with the National Science Centre;
- read the assigned proposals;
- complete and submit the evaluation form for each assigned proposal, providing comments and individual scoring for the proposals;
- participate in panel discussions;
- inform NCN coordinators about the 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 at the end of the process 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.

6.2 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 degree. Coordinators work within the NCN in three units:

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

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

- searching for experts,
- allocating experts to proposals,
- performing the threshold check,
- organizing and facilitating the panel meetings,
- presenting the ranking lists for the Programme Committee and the NCN Director.

7. SELECTION MEETING OF THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

The Coordinators of the National Science Centre present the 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.

Prior to the Programme Committee meeting, NCN will provide access for the Programme Committee members to the evaluated proposals, individual reviews, consensus reports and panel reports. The task of the Programme Committee is to decide about the final ranking order of the proposals on the basis of the total consensus scores assigned to the projects and the panel reports. The Programme Committee will review the proposed preliminary ranking lists of projects and may modify the ranking of the projects in justified cases. The justification for modifications will be detailed in the minutes of the meeting of the Programme Committee. The Chair of the Programme Committee will submit the minutes and the list of recommended projects, together with a reserve list and the list of rejected project applications and the reason for their rejection to NCN. Justification of the Programme Committee is provided to the applicant in the application system ZSUN/OSF or with the Director's decision.

The Programme Committee may modify the ranking list in justified cases, by adding a maximum of one additional point per project in cases where the project:

- is led by a female researcher in scientific areas where the women are under-represented or by a male researcher in scientific areas where the men are under-represented³,
- is led by a young researcher⁴,
- will strengthen bilateral relations between Poland and Norway, through collaboration with a Polish-Norwegian cooperation, for example financed by GRIEG, POLNOR or H2020.

While making a recommendation for funding, for the project awarded with the same number of points, the Programme Committee takes into consideration: a) the quality of the proposals;

³ Scientific area (NCN panel) where less than 40% of projects funded by NCN are led by men/women would be considered under-represented.

⁴ A person who has had a doctoral degree for a period not exceeding 7 years. This period may be extended by a time of long-term (in excess of 90 days) documented sick leaves or rehabilitation leaves granted on account of being unfit to work. In addition, the period may be extended by the number of months of a child care leave granted pursuant to the Labour Code and in the case of women, by 18 months for every child born or adopted, whichever manner of accounting for career breaks is preferable.

b) success rate for each research domain; and c) the overall portfolio of the programme, and d) the total budget for the call.

8. CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

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

8.1 Confidentiality

All proposals 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 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.

8.2 Conflict of interests

Experts are excluded from evaluating an application submitted to the POLS call if:

- they are collaborating with the PI or with the Applicant submitting the application;
- they have been involved, in any way, in drafting the proposal;
- they can draw direct benefits from recommending the application for funding;
- they have close relations with the PI and/or other research partners named in the POLS grant application. Those include: (1) professional relations, like working at the same institution in the past three years, (2) scientific relations, like common publications in the last three years or direct research competition with the PI, (3) personal relations, like family, legal ties, personal conflict;
- they are or were in the past three years employed by the entity employing the PI;
- 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 NCN coordinator, for advice on 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.