Annex 1
to Order No 19/2025
of 14 March 2025
by the Director of the National Science Centre
amending the proposal evaluation procedure
applicable to NCN calls

This Order lays down the proposal evaluation procedure for the Expert Teams in the calls launched by the National Science Centre, namely: OPUS, SONATA, PRELUDIUM, SONATINA, SONATA BIS and MAESTRO.

§ 1.

Whenever this Order refers to:

1) NCN, it shall mean the National Science Centre;
2) Council, it shall mean the Council of the National Science Centre;
3) Director, it shall mean the Director of the National Science Centre;
4) Coordinator, it shall mean the Scientific Coordinator, as defined in Article 2 (5) of the Act on the National Science Centre of 30 June 2010 (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 153; hereinafter referred to as the "NCN Act");
5) Team, it shall mean an Expert Team, as defined in Article 18 (7) of the Act, established to evaluate proposals submitted to the call. The Director shall establish the following teams:
   a) Panel Team, i.e., a Team appointed for each panel defined in an applicable Council Resolution, i.e., falling under the domains of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (HS), Physical Sciences and Engineering (ST), and Life Sciences (NZ);
   b) Inter-Panel Team, i.e., a Team established under a given research domain, i.e. HS, ST or NZ;
   c) Inter-Domain Team, i.e., a Team comprising Experts representing different research domains, i.e., HS, ST and NZ;
6) Chair, it shall mean a Team member appointed by the Council to manage the Team's work;
7) Review, it shall mean a descriptive and well-grounded evaluation of a proposal drafted by an Expert or a Reviewer in accordance with the call documents;
8) Committee, it shall mean a group of Experts comprising the Team, interviewing candidates at Stage II of merit-based evaluation of Proposals in the calls where such an interview is required by this Order and Regulations on awarding funding for research tasks funded by the National Science Centre;
9) Expert, it shall mean an Expert Team member or Committee member;
10) Reviewer, it shall mean an external Expert, as defined in Article 22 (2) of the NCN Act, who reviews the Proposal at Stage II of merit-based evaluation and is not an Expert Team member;
11) Proposal, it shall mean a funding Proposal submitted in response to a call launched by the National Science Centre;

12) Interdisciplinary Proposal, it shall mean a proposal which contains at least one auxiliary NCN Review Panel other than the one to which the proposal was submitted, which has been identified by the Chair as requiring an additional individual review;
13) Partner Institutions, they shall mean foreign research-funding agencies cooperating under the Weave Programme;
14) OPUS LAP Proposal, it shall mean a funding proposal for a research project carried out within the framework of the Weave Programme, submitted to the OPUS call by the Polish research team, if provided for in the call text;
15) Meeting, it shall mean an individual day in a Team's or Committee's session;
16) Session, it shall mean all Meetings of the Team or Committee at a given stage of merit-based evaluation;
17) Edition, it shall mean NCN calls with deadlines expiring on the same date;
18) Ranking List, it shall mean a ranking list of proposals evaluated at Stage II of merit-based evaluation with an indication of proposals recommended for funding;
19) Grant, it shall mean a research project, fellowship or scholarship, for which funding has been awarded by a decision of the NCN Director issued pursuant to Article 33 (1) of the NCN Act;
20) Applicant, it shall mean an entity submitting a Proposal;
21) Host Institution, it shall mean an entity indicated in the Proposal as using the Grant money, as defined in Article 31 (5) of the NCN Act; and
22) Partner, it shall mean an entity other than a member of the group of entities, as defined in Article 27 (1) (2) of the NCN Act.

§ 2. General Provisions

1. Experts shall be selected by the Council pursuant to the document "Expert teams of the National Science Centre: formation and appointment" and shall be appointed by the NCN Director.
2. Expert Teams shall be appointed for each call Edition and shall evaluate Proposals submitted under one or several types of calls, to a particular panel or to a group of panels.
3. The number of Experts and composition of the Expert Team shall be decided upon by the Council, considering the number and subject of Proposals under evaluation and the need to carry out the call in a timely and orderly manner.
4. A Team shall consist of at least five Experts.
5. The work of a Team shall be managed by the Chair appointed by the Council.
6. During the Meetings, the Chair may appoint another Expert to manage the work of the Team in his/her stead. Should the Chair be unable to appoint such an Expert, he/she shall be appointed by the Coordinator.
7. The Experts shall be bound by the ethics standards laid down in the "Code of ethics for experts of the National Science Centre".
8. The Coordinator shall exclude an Expert from the Proposal evaluation procedure in the event of a conflict of interest or justified suspicion of a bias in the Expert's actions.

§ 3. Teams

1. The duties of the Teams shall include:
   1) evaluation of Proposals, including individual Reviews;
   2) compilation of a list of Proposals recommended for Stage II of evaluation;
   3) compilation of Ranking Lists with an indication of Proposals recommended for funding.

§ 4. Coordinators

1. The duties of a Coordinator shall include:
   1) running eligibility checks on Proposals;
   2) providing the Chair with the list of Proposals in which at least one auxiliary NCN Review Panel has been identified in a panel or group of disciplines other than the one to which the Proposal was submitted;
   3) naming Experts to draft individual Reviews in the event of the Chair experiencing a conflict of interest;
   4) naming additional Experts to evaluate Interdisciplinary Proposals; additional Experts shall be appointed from other Teams established to evaluate Proposals in the same Edition of the calls;
   5) requesting Experts to review Proposals that are reasonably suspected to be incompliant with at least one condition of the call text. The foregoing applies to Proposals where an additional review is necessary to verify compliance with that condition;
   6) organising Team Meetings or Committee Meetings, including:
      a) summoning Meetings and participating in them;
      b) verifying the conformity of the Meeting minutes drawn up by the recording clerk with the actual course of the Meetings and resolutions of the Team or Committee;
   7) appointing Reviewers with the Director's authorisation among the candidates put forward by the Experts;
   8) assessing the accuracy and impartiality of the reviews drafted by the Experts and Reviewers and
   9) providing the Director with the Ranking Lists compiled by the Experts and Reviewers for his approval.
2. Coordinators shall organise the Team's work and cooperate with the Chair.

§ 5. Chair

1. The duties of the Chair shall include:
   1) indicating Experts to draft individual Reviews at Stage I of merit-based evaluation, except as provided for in § 4 (1) (3);
   2) selecting Interdisciplinary Proposals from the list presented by the Coordinator, for which (in well-justified cases) an auxiliary Review shall be drafted; The Chair may consult his/her decision in this respect with the Experts drafting individual Reviews;
   3) chairing the Team Meetings, subject to § 2 (6);

4) conducting voting and
5) approving the minutes from the Team Meetings.

2. The Chair shall cooperate with the Coordinator.

§ 6. Experts

1. The duties of the Experts shall include:
   1) drafting individual Reviews on Proposals assigned by the Chair or Coordinator at Stage I of merit-based evaluation and presenting them during the first Session;
   2) drafting an auxiliary Review of the Interdisciplinary Proposal at the Coordinator's request;
   3) drafting an auxiliary Review of the Proposal that is reasonably suspected to be incompliant with at least one condition of the call text;
   4) participating in the Meetings, as well as:
      a) drafting justifications for the final decision on the Proposals they have been assigned during the Meetings;
      b) putting forward the candidacies of at least five Reviewers to review each Proposal they reviewed at Stage 1 of merit-based evaluation which has been approved for Stage 2 of evaluation;
      c) presenting Reviewers' individual Reviews of the Proposals they have been assigned during the second Session; and
      d) participating in the work of the Committee.

§ 7. Proposal Evaluation Stages

1. Proposals shall be subject to an eligibility check followed by merit-based evaluation, subject to §7 (5).
2. Eligibility check of Proposals shall be performed by the Coordinators.
3. Eligibility check shall comprise:
   1) verification of the Proposal for completeness,
   2) verification whether the Proposal complies with the requirements set out in the call text,
   3) verification whether the costs comply with the Regulations,
   4) in addition, in the case of OPUS LAP Proposals, verification whether Proposals submitted by the foreign research teams to their respective partner institutions have been found eligible;
   5) in addition, in the case of Applicants outside of the public finance sector operating for less than 5 years on the end date of the call for proposals, analysis of their legal and organisational as well as financial situation in order to assess whether they can establish a relevant security for correct use of the Grant. In the case of Applicants who are natural persons, the analysis referred to in the preceding sentence shall be performed with respect to the Host Institution, while in the case of Applicants that form a Group of Entities, with respect to each Partner individually.

4. Entities operating for over 5 years can also be subject to the analysis referred to in §7 (3) (5) if their evaluation gives rise to any doubts as to whether the Applicant, Host Institution or Partner can provide a sufficient warranty for correct use of the Grant.
5. The analysis referred to in §7 (3) (5) shall be performed within the deadline of no less than 7 days and shall be based on the following documents required for the purposes of the eligibility check:
    1) declaration with the exact location of the Grant project, including the ownership title to real estate hosting the Grant project,
    2) declaration with information on the technical and office infrastructure,
    3) declaration with information on entity's HR capacity (including number of employees and associates),
    4) declaration with information on the implementation of other projects financed from external sources,
    5) statutory documents (memorandum and articles of association, by-laws, etc.),
    6) documents confirming financial standing of the entity,
    7) clearance certificate confirming due payment of taxes, social security contributions and other public charges.
6. Only Proposals that have been found eligible shall be accepted for a merit-based evaluation, subject to §7 (7).
7. If the analysis referred to in §7 (3) (5) gives rise to any doubts as to whether the Applicant, Host Institution or Partner can provide a sufficient warranty for correct use of the Grant, a Proposal shall be conditionally subject to a merit-based evaluation, of which the Applicant shall be notified by the Director in writing, after the eligibility check.
8. A Proposal can also be rejected as ineligible at a later stage of evaluation, in particular, if the deadline set in §7 (5) is not met.
9. A merit-based evaluation shall be performed by the Team, pursuant to the terms of the call and evaluation criteria applicable to the call laid down in the Regulations.
10. Under OPUS, PRELUDIUM and SONATA, the merit-based evaluation shall be carried out in two stages:
    1) Stage I:
    - individual Reviews shall be drafted by two members of the Team acting independently and presented at the First Session. In the case of a Proposal which is assigned an auxiliary NCN Review Panel specifying disciplines covered by NCN review panels other than the one to which the Proposal was submitted, the Chair may decide to seek an auxiliary Review from a member of another Team;
    - the final decision on the Proposal shall be agreed upon by the Team based on the individual Reviews;
    - a list of Proposals recommended for Stage II of evaluation shall be agreed upon;
    - justifications for the final decision on Proposals not recommended for Stage II of evaluation shall be drafted.

    At Stage I, the data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto shall be evaluated, with the exception of the full project description.
    2) Stage II:
    - individual Reviews shall be made by at least two Reviewers acting individually, based on the data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto, with the exception of the short

project description. In well-justified cases, exceptions to the above requirements regarding the number of individual Reviews shall be admitted. The reason for the exception shall be reported to the Director by the Coordinator;
- Reviews drafted by the Reviewers shall be presented by the Experts at the Second Session;
- the final decision on the Proposal shall be agreed upon by the Team based on the individual Reviews;
- Ranking Lists shall be compiled, specifying Proposals recommended for funding;
- justifications for the final decision shall be drafted for proposals that are not recommended for funding.

11. Under SONATINA, SONATA BIS and MAESTRO, the merit-based evaluation shall be carried out in two stages:

1) Stage I:

- individual Reviews shall be drafted by two members of the Team and presented at the First Session. In the case of a Proposal which is assigned an auxiliary NCN Review Panel specifying disciplines covered by NCN review panels other than the one to which the Proposal was submitted, the Chair may decide to seek an auxiliary Review from a member of another Team;
- the final decision on the Proposal shall be agreed upon by the Team based on the individual Reviews;
- a list of Proposals recommended for Stage II shall be agreed upon;
- justifications for the final decision shall be drafted for Proposals not recommended for Stage II of evaluation.

At Stage I, the data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto shall be evaluated, with the exception of the full project description.

2) Stage II:

- individual Reviews shall be made by at least two Reviewers based on the data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto, with the exception of the short project description. Exceptions to the above requirements regarding the number of individual Reviews are admitted for well-justified cases. The reason for the exception shall be reported to the Director by the Coordinator;
- Reviews drafted by the Reviewers shall be presented by the Experts at the Second Session;
- the principal investigator shall be interviewed by the Experts;
    - the principal investigator shall be notified of the interview by the Coordinator 14 days in advance at the latest;
    - the Coordinator shall provide the principal investigator with the Reviews on the Proposal within 7 days before the interview;
    - the principal investigator shall participate in the interview held in Polish or in English at the premises of the National Science Centre. The language of the interview shall depend on the terms of the call and composition of the Committee. Under the MAESTRO call, the interview shall be held in English
    - in exceptional and well-justified cases, the NCN shall allow for an interview to be held via available telecommunications tools;
    - failure to appear for the interview shall be deemed as withdrawal from applying for funding of the Proposal under the call;

- the final decision on the Proposal shall be agreed upon by the Team based on the Experts' and Reviewers' individual Reviews and interview with the principal investigator conducted by the Experts;
- Ranking Lists shall be compiled, specifying Proposals recommended for funding; and
- justifications for the final decision shall be drafted for proposals that are not recommended for funding.

§ 8. Team Meetings

1. The duration of Team Meetings shall be established with regard to the number of Proposals to be reviewed and the volume of work necessary for their evaluation.
2. On having completed all individual Reviews assigned to him/her, the Expert shall be given electronic access to all the other individual Reviews drafted within the Team to which he/she was appointed.
3. Team Meetings shall be held in the presence of a quorum of more than a half of the Team's members.
4. Team Meetings shall be held by the Chair or Expert appointed in his/her stead.
5. A Coordinator and recording clerk shall participate in every Team Meeting but shall not take part in the voting.
6. In the case of a conflict of interest, the Expert shall have to leave the Meeting room. Exclusion of the Expert on the grounds of a conflict of interest shall not affect the quorum when voting.
7. The minutes shall be kept by the recording clerk and approved by the Coordinator and Chair.

§ 9. Committee Meetings

1. In order to interview candidates, Committees shall be formed, composed of the Experts.
2. The number of Committees shall depend on the number of Proposals approved for Stage II of merit-based evaluation and the number of Experts.
3. A Committee shall comprise at least five Experts.
4. A Committee Meeting shall be held in the presence of a quorum of more than half of the Committee members.
5. A Coordinator and recording clerk shall participate in every Committee Meeting.
6. In the case of a conflict of interest, the Expert shall have to leave the Meeting room. Exclusion of the Expert on the grounds of a conflict of interest shall not affect the quorum when voting.
7. The recording clerk shall keep the minutes of the Committee Meetings, which shall be annexed to the minutes of the Team Meetings.

§10. Evaluation of Proposals at the Team Meetings

1. All Proposals approved for the merit-based evaluation shall be the subject of discussions at a Team Meeting.

2. The merit-based evaluation of Proposals shall be based on the individual criteria and discussions on the Proposal as compared to other Proposals reviewed under the call. The evaluation criteria are laid down in the applicable documents.
3. The Team shall approve or reject the budget but must not amend the Proposal in this respect.
4. The Expert Team shall decide to reject the Proposal if at least one condition of the call is not met.
5. Under OPUS, PRELUDIUM and SONATA, Proposals shall be allotted a score based on Experts' and Reviewers' individual Reviews and, if applicable, auxiliary Reviews in the case of Interdisciplinary Proposals.
6. Under SONATINA, SONATA BIS and MAESTRO, Proposals shall be allotted a score based on Experts' and Reviewers' individual Reviews and interview with the principal investigator conducted by the Experts, and, if applicable, auxiliary Reviews in the case of Interdisciplinary Proposals.
7. The score shall be for convenience purposes only. The final decision whether or not to recommend the Proposal for funding shall be taken by the Team.
8. Individual Reviews shall be treated merely as a point of departure for the Team's discussions on the final decision on the Proposal. If necessary, the Team shall agree on a score, otherwise it shall rely on the average of individual decisions suggested by the Experts or Reviewers.
9. During the discussions, the Experts shall address the individual Reviews drafted by the Reviewers.
10. While agreeing on the Proposal's final decision, the Team may fully agree with the Reviewers' Review, partly agree with it, or disagree with it.
11. If the Team cannot find a common position on the decision of a Proposal, the Team shall make the decision by way of a vote.
12. Decisions by the Team that should require a vote shall be taken by a simple majority.
13. Ranking Lists must be approved by an absolute majority vote.
14. The Team may conditionally recommend one Proposal for funding, which is partially within the limit of available funds agreed upon by the Council.
15. The Team shall recommend only those OPUS LAP Proposals for funding that are among 20% of Proposals with the highest rank among all those submitted to the OPUS call under particular NCN Review Panels. The OPUS LAP Proposals shall be funded by the NCN provided that the Team's recommendations are approved by respective partner institutions of the foreign research teams. In the case of OPUS LAP Proposals, the Polish research teams shall be awarded funding for those research projects that receive parallel funding from their respective partner institutions.
16. The funding decision on Proposals referred to in §14 shall be taken by the Director based on the percentage rate of exceeding the budget available for a given call under specific disciplines or groups of disciplines.
17. The Team shall not be required to distribute the whole funding available and must not recommend Proposals that exceed the available funding, subject to § 10 (14).

§ 11. Ranking Lists

1. The Coordinator shall present the Director with the Ranking Lists compiled by the Teams.
2. In specific cases, the Coordinator may, having consulted the Team, modify the order of research projects on the Ranking List. The modification procedure shall be as follows:
   1) the consultation may have the form of circulating a query to all Experts with a justification of suggested modification and time fixed for their response;
   2) after the lapse of time fixed for the response, the Coordinator shall decide on the modification based on the opinions received from the Experts and
   3) Expert's failure to respond on time shall be deemed as his/ her disagreement with the suggested modification
3. In the cases referred to in §11 (2), the Coordinator shall provide the Director with the modified Ranking List (together with a written justification) for his approval.
4. In well-justified cases, the Director may, regardless of any doubts arising from the analysis referred to in §7 (3) (5), approve the Ranking List and impose an obligation on the Applicant, Host Institution or Leader of the Group of Entities, as defined in Article 27 (1) (2) of the NCN Act, by way of his decision referred to in Article 33 (1) of the NCN Act, to establish a relevant security for correct use of the within the prescribed period.