

This Order lays down the proposal evaluation procedure for the Expert Teams under the DAINA 3 call for Polish and Lithuanian research projects.

## **§ 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) RCL, it shall mean the Research Council of Lithuania;
- 5) 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”);
- 6) Team, it shall mean an Expert Team, as defined in Article 18 (7) of the Act, established to evaluate proposals submitted to the call under a specific domain, i.e. Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (HS), Physical Sciences and Engineering (ST), and Life Sciences (NZ);
- 7) Chair, it shall mean a Team member appointed by the Council to manage the Team’s work;
- 8) 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;
- 9) Expert, it shall mean an Expert Team 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) Meeting, it shall mean an individual day in a Team's session;
- 14) Session, it shall mean all Meetings of the Team or at a given stage of merit-based evaluation;
- 15) Edition, it shall mean NCN calls with deadlines expiring on the same date;
- 16) Ranking Long List, it shall mean a ranking list of proposals evaluated at stage I of merit-based evaluation with an indication of proposals recommended for stage II of merit-based evaluation;
- 17) Ranking Short 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;
- 18) 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;
- 19) Applicant, it shall mean an entity submitting a Proposal;
- 20) 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
- 21) 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 evaluating Proposals shall be selected by the Council pursuant to the document "Expert Teams of the National Science Centre – establishing and appointing" and subject to the RCL's recommendations. Experts shall be appointed by the NCN Director.
2. 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.
3. A Team shall consist of at least five Experts.
4. The work of a Team shall be managed by the Chair of the Team appointed by the Council.
5. During the meetings, the Chair of the Team may appoint another Expert to manage the work of the Team in his/her stead. Should the Chair of the Team be unable to appoint such an Expert, he/she shall be appointed by the Coordinator.

6. The Experts shall be bound by the ethics standards laid down in the “Code of ethics for experts of the National Science Centre”.
7. 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. Team**

1. The duties of the Teams shall include:
  - 1) evaluation of Proposals, including individual Reviews;
  - 2) compilation of a Ranking Long List of Proposals with an indication of Proposals recommended for stage II of merit-based evaluation;
  - 3) compilation of Ranking Short 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 used in a 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) organising Team 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;
  - 6) choosing Reviewers among, *inter alia*, the candidates put forward by the Experts;
  - 7) assessing the accuracy and impartiality of the Reviews; and
  - 8) compiling the Ranking Short Lists and delivering them to the Director for his approval.
2. Coordinators shall organise the Team’s work and cooperate with the Chair of the Team.

## **§ 5. Chair**

1. The duties of the Chair shall include:
  - 1) indicating Experts to draft individual Reviews at the first stage of the merit-based evaluation, with the exception of the situation described 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 the situation described in § 2 (5);
  - 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 the first stage of the 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) 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 the first stage of merit-based evaluation which has been approved for stage II of evaluation; and
    - c) presenting Reviewers' individual Reviews of the Proposals they have been assigned during the second Session.

## **§ 7. Proposal Evaluation Stages**

1. Proposals shall be subject to an eligibility check followed by a merit-based evaluation.
2. An eligibility check is performed by the NCN and the RCL according to their respective terms.
3. At the NCN, an eligibility check of Proposals shall be performed by the Coordinators.
4. At the National Science Centre, an eligibility check of Proposals 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 expenditure outlined in Proposal with regard to the Polish part of the Project comply with the rules laid down by the Council in the call documents,
  - 4) in addition, in the case of Applicants outside of the public finance sector or Applicants that do not receive any institutional core funding for research activity, 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; the analysis may, in particular, cover the period in which the Applicant has carried out research on a continuous basis, examination of the Applicant's assets, including availability of the appropriate research, administrative and office infrastructure and examination of the statutory documents that constitute the basis for the Applicant's business. 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.
5. Only Proposals that have been found eligible by both the NCN and the RCL shall be accepted for merit-based evaluation.
  6. If the analysis referred to in § 7 (4) (4) gives rise to any doubts as to whether the Applicant, Host Institution or Partner can establish a relevant security for correct use of the Grant, the Proposal may be conditionally subject to merit-based evaluation. If such is the case, the Director shall require that the Applicant, Host Institution or Partner provide additional explanations concerning their legal and organisational and financial situation or submit documents to confirm the same, within the deadline of no less than 7 days.
  7. A proposal may also be rejected as ineligible at the stage of merit-based evaluation, in particular, if the deadline referred to in §7 (6) is not adhered to or if the analysis of the explanations or documents does not dispel the doubts as to whether the Applicant, Host Institution or Partner establish a relevant security for correct use of the Grant.
  8. The merit-based evaluation shall be performed by the Team, pursuant to the terms of the call and evaluation criteria laid down by the Council in the call documents.
  9. The merit-based evaluation of Proposals in DAINA 3 shall be carried out in two stages:
    - 1) Stage I:
      - a) individual Reviews shall be drafted by two members of the Team. In the case of Interdisciplinary Proposals, the Chair of the Team may decide to seek an auxiliary Review from a member of another Team;
      - b) the final decision on the Proposal shall be agreed upon by the Expert Team based on the individual Reviews;

- c) a Ranking Long List of Proposals recommended for stage II of evaluation shall be agreed upon and
- d) 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:

- a) individual Reviews shall be made by the Reviewers based on the data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto, with the exception of the short project description.
- b) the final decision on the Proposal shall be agreed upon by the Expert Team based on the individual Reviews drafted by the Reviewers;
- c) Ranking Short List shall be compiled, specifying Proposals recommended for funding and
- d) 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 should 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 access to all the other individual Reviews drafted within the Team to which he/she was appointed by electronic means.
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. Evaluation of Proposals at 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 shall be laid down by the Council in the call documents.
3. The Team shall approve or reject the budget but must not amend the Proposal in this respect.
4. The percentage contribution of each criterion to the individual evaluation of Proposals shall be laid down by the Council in the call documents.
5. Proposals shall be allotted a score based on individual Reviews and, if applicable, auxiliary Reviews in the case of Interdisciplinary Proposals.
6. The score shall be for convenience purposes only. The Team shall ultimately decide whether or not to recommend the Proposal to stage II of merit-based evaluation or for funding.
7. 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.
8. During the discussions, the Experts must address the individual Reviews drafted by the Reviewers.
9. 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.
10. The final score of the Proposal shall be reflected in its position on the Ranking Long List or Ranking Short List compiled by the Team.
11. Proposals with a zero score or "no" decision agreed by the Team in any reviewed criterion (except for the data management and ethics issues) shall not be recommended for funding.
12. 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.
13. Decisions by the Team that should require a vote shall be taken by a simple majority.
14. Ranking Lists must be approved by an absolute majority vote.
15. Proposals whose aggregate cost does not exceed the funds agreed by the Council for the DAINA 3 call under specific groups of disciplines shall be recommended for funding by the Team.

16. The Team may conditionally recommend one Proposal for funding, which is partially within the limit of funds agreed upon by the Council.
17. Proposals shall be funded by the NCN provided that the recommendations are approved by the RCL. The Polish research teams shall be awarded funding for those Projects only, in the case of which the Lithuanian research teams receive funding from the RCL within the framework of the funds allocated for the call by the RCL.
18. The funding decision on Proposals referred to in §9 (16) shall be taken by the Director, subject to §9 (17).
19. The Team shall not be required to distribute the whole funding available and must not recommend funding Proposals that exceed the available funding, subject to §9 (16).

### **§ 10. Ranking Lists**

1. The Coordinator shall present the Director with the Ranking Lists compiled by the Team.
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 §10 (2), the Coordinator shall provide the Director with the modified Ranking List (together with a written justification) for his/her approval.
4. In well-justified cases, the Director may, regardless of any doubts arising from the analysis referred to in §7 (4) (4), 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 Grant (e.g. promissory note, bank guarantee) within the prescribed period.