

The Order lays down the detailed procedure for evaluating Proposals submitted to the OPUS, SONATA, PRELUDIUM, PRELUDIUM BIS, SONATINA, SONATA BIS, MAESTRO and ETIUDA calls launched by the National Science Centres by the Expert Teams.

§ 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 2019, item 1384, hereinafter: the "Act" );
- 5) Team, it shall mean an Expert Team:
  - a) Panel Team, it shall mean an Expert Team established for each panel defined by 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, it shall mean an Expert Team appointed under a given research domain, i.e. HS, ST or NZ;
  - c) Inter-Domain Team, it shall mean an Expert Team comprising Experts representing different research domains, i.e. HS, ST and NZ;
- 6) Committee, it shall mean a group of Experts comprising the Expert Team, interviewing candidates at the second stage of merit-based evaluation of research 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;
- 7) Expert, it shall mean an Expert Team member or Committee member;
- 8) Reviewer, it shall mean an external expert, as defined in Article 22 (2) of the Act, who reviews the Proposal at the second stage of merit-based evaluation and is not an Expert Team member;
- 9) Proposal, it shall mean a Proposal submitted in response to a call launched by the National Science Centre;
- 10) 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 specified by the chair as requiring an additional individual review;
- 11) LAP cooperation (cooperation pursuant to the Lead Agency Procedure), it shall mean cooperation between research funding institutions under which proposals for funding of research projects may be submitted to the NCN under the OPUS call (subject to Point 13) carried out jointly with foreign research teams applying for parallel funding thereof from the cooperating institutions;
- 12) partner institutions, they shall mean foreign research funding institutions acting pursuant to the Lead Agency Procedure based on agreements concluded with the

NCN;

- 13) OPUS LAP proposal, it shall mean a proposal for funding of a research project carried out in the framework of LAP cooperation, submitted to the OPUS call by a Polish research team, if provided for in the call announcement;
- 14) Meeting, it shall mean a single day in an Expert Team's or Committee's Session;
- 15) Session, it shall mean all Meetings of the Expert Team or Committee at a given stage of the merit-based evaluation;
- 16) Edition, it shall mean calls launched by the National Science Centre with deadlines expiring on the same date;
- 17) Ranking Long List, it shall mean the ranking list of Proposals evaluated at the first stage of the merit-based evaluation with an indication of proposals approved for the second stage of merit-based evaluation;
- 18) Ranking Short List, it shall mean the ranking list of Proposals evaluated at the second stage of the 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 the NCN Director's decision issued pursuant to Article 33 (1) of the 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 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 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 they may carry out evaluation of Proposals submitted under one or several types of calls, to a particular panel (Panel Teams) or to a group of panels (Inter-Panel or Inter-Domain Teams).
- 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 an Expert Team shall be managed by a Chair appointed by the Council.
- 6) During the Meetings, a Team's Chair may appoint another Expert to manage the work of the Team in his/her stead. Should the Team's Chair be unable to appoint such an Expert, he/she shall be appointed by the Coordinator.
- 7) The Experts shall be bound by the ethical rules principles 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;
- 2) compilation of a Ranking Long List and Ranking Short List of projects under a given call.

#### **§ 4. Coordinators**

1. The duties of a Coordinator shall include:
  - 1) running eligibility checks on Proposals, subject to the second sentence of §7 (2);
  - 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 opinions in the event of the Team's Chair experiencing a conflict of interest;
  - 4) naming additional experts to evaluate Interdisciplinary Proposals; additional Experts shall be appointed from other Expert Teams established to evaluate proposals in the same edition of the calls;
  - 5) 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;
  - 6) indicating Reviewers, taking into account the candidacies put forward by the Experts;
  - 7) assessing the accuracy and impartiality of the opinions drafted by the Experts and Reviewers; and
  - 8) presenting the Director with the Ranking Lists established by the Teams for his approval.
2. Coordinators shall organise the Team's work and cooperate with the Team's Chair.

#### **§ 5. Team's Chair**

1. The duties of the Team's Chair shall include:
  - 1) indicating Experts to draft individual opinions 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 additional evaluation shall be drafted. The Chair may consult his decision in this respect with the Experts drafting individual opinions;
  - 3) chairing the Team Meetings, subject to the situation described in § 2 (6);
  - 4) conducting voting and
  - 5) approving the minutes from the Team Meetings;
2. The Team's Chair shall cooperate with the Coordinator.

#### **§ 6. Experts**

1. The duties of the Experts shall include:
  - 1) drafting individual opinions on Proposals assigned by the Team's Chair or Coordinator at the first stage of the merit-based evaluation and presenting them during the first Session;
  - 2) drafting a second evaluation of the Interdisciplinary Proposal at the Coordinator's request;

- 3) participating in the Team Meetings, as well as:
  - a) drafting justifications for the final grades of the Proposals they have been assigned during the Team Meetings;
  - b) putting forward the candidacies of at least five Reviewers to provide their opinion on each Proposal they reviewed at the first stage of merit-based evaluation and which has been approved for the second stage of evaluation;
  - c) presenting individual opinions by Reviewers regarding 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 eligibility check and merit-based evaluation.
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 all the requirements set out in the call announcement,
  - 3) verification whether the expenditure complies with the terms specified by the Council in the call documents,
  - 4) in the case of OPUS LAP proposals, verification whether proposals submitted by the foreign research teams to their respective partner institutions are approved as eligible and
  - 5) in the case of Applicants outside of the public finance sector or Applicants that do not receive any institutional core funding for research activity, the analysis of their legal and organisational and financial situation in order to assess whether they can provide a sufficient warranty 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.
4. Only Proposals approved as eligible shall be accepted for merit-based evaluation, subject to Point 5.
5. If the analysis referred to in Point 3 (5) gives rise to any doubts as to whether the Applicant, Host Institution or Partner provides a sufficient warranty 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 prescribed period of no less than 7 days.
6. The merit-based evaluation of proposals shall be carried out by the Teams and Reviewers.
7. A proposal may be rejected as not eligible at a later stage of evaluation, in particular, if the deadline referred to in Point 5 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 provide a sufficient warranty for correct use of the Grant.

8. The merit-based evaluation of funding Proposals under the OPUS, PRELUDIUM, PRELUDIUM BIS and SONATA calls shall be performed in two stages:
- 1) at the first stage, Proposals shall undergo a qualification check, based on the data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto, with the exception of the joint project description (JPD). In the case of PRELUDIUM BIS, the qualification check shall be performed based on all data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto. The qualification check shall consist in:
    - a) individual opinions drafted by two Experts working independently;
    - b) additional individual opinions for Interdisciplinary Proposals;
    - c) Team's verdict delivered at the first Session consisting in discussing (*inter alia*) the individual opinions and establishing a Ranking Long List;
      - approved for the second stage are Proposals whose total forecasted cost is up to twice the value of funds allocated by the Council for a given call under particular discipline panels;
  - 2) at the second stage, Proposals shall undergo specialist evaluation, based on the data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto, with the exception of the JPD. In the case of PRELUDIUM BIS, the specialist evaluation shall be performed based on all data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto. The specialist evaluation shall consist in:
    - a) individual opinions drafted by at least two Reviewers working independently. Exceptions to the above requirements regarding the number of opinions are admitted for well-justified cases. The reason for the exception shall be reported to the Director by the Coordinator;
    - b) Team's verdict delivered at the second Session consisting in discussing (*inter alia*) the individual opinions and establishing a Ranking Short List.
9. The merit-based evaluation of funding Proposals under the SONATINA, SONATA BIS and MAESTRO calls shall be performed in two stages:
- 1) at the first stage, Proposals shall undergo a qualification check, based on the data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto, with the exception of the JPD. The qualification check shall consist in:
    - a) individual opinions drafted by two Experts working independently;
    - b) additional individual opinions for Interdisciplinary Proposals;
    - c) Team's verdict delivered at the first Session consisting in discussing (*inter alia*) the individual opinions and establishing a Ranking Long List;
      - approved for the second stage are Proposals whose total forecasted cost is up to twice the value of funds allocated by the Council for a given call under particular discipline panels;
  - 2) at the second stage, Proposals shall undergo specialist evaluation, based on the data included in the Proposal and annexes thereto, with the exception of the JPD. The specialist evaluation shall consist in:
    - a) individual opinions drafted by at least two Reviewers working independently. Exceptions to the above requirements regarding the number of opinions are admitted for well-justified cases. The reason for the exception shall be reported to the Director by the Coordinator;
    - b) evaluation of an interview with the Principal Investigator held by the Experts:

- the Principal Investigator shall be notified of the interview by the Coordinator no later than 14 days before its forecasted date;
- the Coordinator shall provide the Principal Investigator with the Experts' and Reviewers' opinions on the Proposal no later than 7 days before the interview;
- the Principal Investigator shall be interviewed in Polish or in English at the registered office of NCN. 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, NCN shall allow for an interview to be held via available telecommunications tools. A remote interview shall be held under the Principal Investigator's responsibility and at his/her risk;
- failure to appear for the interview shall be deemed as withdrawal from applying for funding of the Proposal under the call;

c) Team's verdict delivered at the second Session consisting in discussing (*inter alia*) individual opinions, results of the interview and establishing a Ranking Short List.

10. The merit-based evaluation of Proposals for funding of doctoral scholarships under the ETIUDA call shall be performed in two stages:

1) at the first stage, Proposals shall undergo evaluation consisting in:

- a) individual opinions drafted by two Experts working independently;
- b) additional individual opinions for Interdisciplinary Proposals;
- c) Team's verdict delivered at the first Session consisting in discussing (*inter alia*) the individual opinions and establishing a Ranking Long List;

- approved for the second stage are Proposals whose total forecasted cost is up to twice the value of funds allocated by the Council for a given call under particular disciplines;

2) at the second stage, Proposals shall undergo evaluation consisting in:

a) evaluation of an interview with the candidate held by the Experts:

- a candidate shall be notified of the interview by the Coordinator no later than 14 days before its forecasted date;
- the Coordinator shall provide the Candidate with the Experts' opinions on the Proposal no later than 7 days before the interview;
- a candidate shall be interviewed in Polish or in English at the registered office of NCN. The language of the interview shall depend on the terms of the call and composition of the Committee;
- in exceptional and well-justified cases, NCN shall allow for an interview to be held via available telecommunications tools. A remote interview shall be held upon the candidate's responsibility and at his/her risk;
- failure to appear for the interview shall be deemed as withdrawal from applying for funding of the Proposal under the call;

b) Team's verdict delivered at the second Session consisting in discussions and the results of the interview and establishing a Ranking Short List.

### **§ 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 opinions assigned to him/her, the Expert shall be given access to all the other individual opinions 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 Team's 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 Team's 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 the second stage of the 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 analysis and discussion at a Team Meeting.
2. The budget shall not be changed.
3. Under the OPUS, PRELUDIUM, PRELUDIUM BIS and SONATA calls, Proposals shall be allotted an auxiliary score based on Experts' and Reviewers' individual reviews and, if applicable, auxiliary reviews for the Interdisciplinary Proposals.
4. Under the SONATINA, SONATA BIS and MAESTRO calls, Proposals shall be allotted an auxiliary score based on Experts' and Reviewers' individual reviews and, if applicable, auxiliary reviews for the Interdisciplinary Proposals. Furthermore, after the interview, the Commission shall pass recommendations for Proposals: A. Proposal recommended for funding; B. Proposal recommended for funding in the second place; C. Proposal not recommended for funding.
5. Under the ETIUDA calls, Proposals shall be allotted an auxiliary score based on Experts' individual reviews and, in addition, after the interview, the Team shall pass recommendations

for Proposals: A. Proposal recommended for funding; B. Proposal recommended for funding in the second place; C. Proposal not recommended for funding.

6. Individual opinions shall not be binding upon the Team and shall be treated merely as a point of departure for the discussions on the final grade. The Team may establish an auxiliary score.
7. The final grade shall be based on the analysis of individual criteria and discussions on the Proposal as compared to other Proposals reviewed under the call. The evaluation criteria are laid down in other applicable documents.
8. Reviewers' opinions shall not be binding upon the Team, however the Experts must address them.
9. While settling the Proposal's final grade, the Team may fully agree with the Reviewers' opinion, partly agree with it, or disagree with it.
10. Proposals with a zero score or "no" decision agreed by the Expert Team in any reviewed criterion cannot be recommended for funding. It does not apply to the data management evaluation criteria, evaluation of the ethics issues in research and evaluation of principal investigator's participation in the international research projects that are not funded from the Polish budget, in particular in the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation (ERC 7th Framework Programme, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe). Proposals deemed incompliant with any criteria of the call announcement by the Expert Team cannot be recommended for funding.
11. In the case of the Team's preliminary opinion that the Proposal has been submitted to the wrong panel, the Team shall consider the opinion of the expert performing auxiliary evaluation of the Interdisciplinary Proposal. The proposal which, in the Expert's/ Experts' opinion, may impact both disciplines cannot be rejected on the grounds that it has been submitted to the wrong panel.
12. Under the OPUS call, proposals that are not recommended for the second stage of merit-based evaluation cannot be submitted to the next edition of the call. The Expert Team may choose 10% of proposals that have not been recommended for the second stage of merit-based evaluation that can be submitted to the next edition of the OPUS call. If less than 10 proposals are not recommended for the second stage of merit-based evaluation, the Expert Team can only choose 1 proposal as such.  
The foregoing does not apply to proposals that have not been recommended for the second stage of merit-based evaluation merely on the grounds that they do not meet the terms of the call or have unreasonable budget or have been submitted to the wrong panel.
13. If the Team cannot find a common position on the evaluation of a Proposal, the Team shall make the decision by way of a vote.
14. Decisions by the Team that should require a vote shall be taken by a simple majority.
15. Ranking Long Lists and Ranking Short Lists must be approved by an absolute majority vote.
16. The Team may conditionally recommend one Proposal for funding, which is partially within the limit of available funds agreed upon by the Council.
17. The Expert Team recommends 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. OPUS LAP proposals shall be funded by the NCN provided that the recommendations are approved by the partner institutions relevant for the foreign research teams, subject to the first sentence.



18. The funding decision with regard to Proposals referred to in Point 16 shall be taken by the NCN Director, subject to the percentage indicator of the budget for the specific call being trespassed within individual disciplines or groups of disciplines.
19. The Polish research teams shall be awarded funding for those research projects covered by OPUS LAP proposals for which the foreign research teams receive parallel funding from the partner institutions.
20. The Team shall not be required to distribute the whole funding available and cannot recommend funding Proposals that exceed the available funding, subject to Point 16.

### **§ 11. Ranking Lists**

1. The Coordinator shall present the Director with Ranking Lists compiled by the Teams. In the case of OPUS LAP proposals, subject to §10 (17).
2. In exceptional 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, taking into account 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 event referred to in Point 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 Act, by way of his decision referred to in Article 33 (1) of the Act, to establish a relevant security for correct use of the Grant (e.g. promissory note, bank guarantee) within the prescribed period.