Guidelines for referee panels assessing *Collaborative and Knowledge-building Project*

The objective and purposes of the call for proposal

The purpose of a *Collaborative and Knowledge-building Project* is to develop new knowledge and generate research competence needed by society or the business sector to address important societal challenges. The research is of basic and/or applied nature and should benefit broad segments of society.

An important purpose of the call is also to stimulate and support collaboration between the research communities and those who represent the societal challenge for which funding is sought. Only Norwegian research organizations can apply for funding under the call, but collaboration with relevant actors from outside the research sector is mandatory.

The Research Council of Norway have two main calls for Collaborative and Knowledge-building project:

- Collaborative project to meet societal and industry-related challenges
- Knowledge-building project for industry

The calls are only open for specific topics, grouped into thematic areas (no open arena). You will find more information about *your* relevant call and thematic area in *Attachment 1*.

The referee panel assessment process

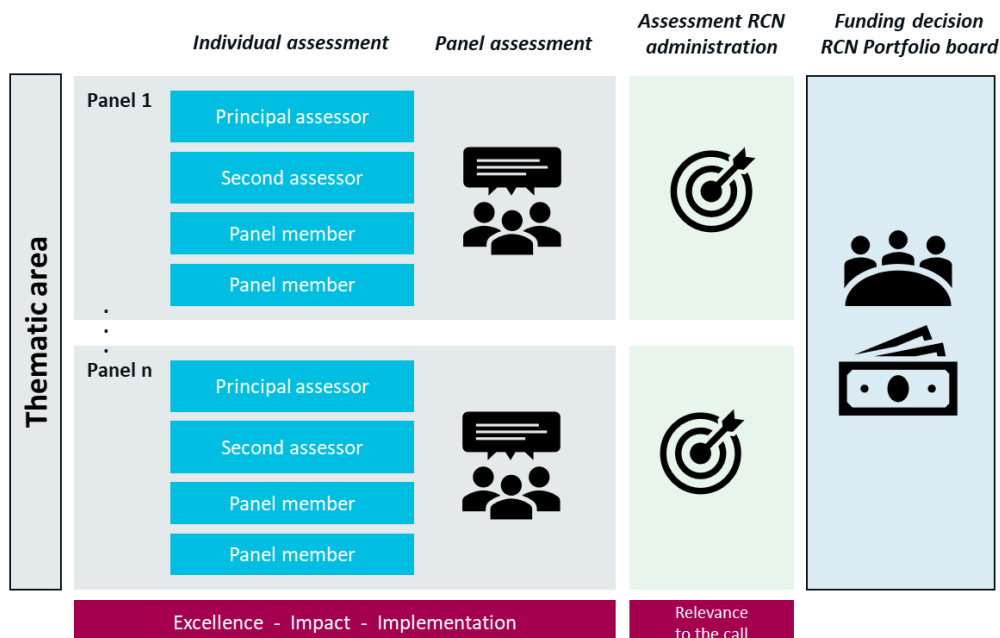The assessment of the submitted applications will proceed in steps according to *Figure 1* below.

Figure 1 Overview of the assessment process

As shown in *Figure 1*, we ask for your individual assessment of the applications before you meet in the panel.

The assessment is based on the application form, the 11-page project description, Letters of Intent from all partners, and the CVs of the project manager and key project participants.

All panel members are required to read and participate in the assessment of all applications.

Each application will be assigned a principal and a second assessor. Please note that you may be asked to serve as principal or second assessor for proposals in fields outside your own primary areas of expertise.

If necessary, expertise is not available within the panel, the Research Council administration will recruit additional external expertise to support the panel's work.

Preparations prior to the panel meeting

Prior to the panel meeting, we ask you to prepare and submit individual assessments of each proposal as follows:

- *The principal assessor* must submit an assessment, grading all criteria and giving thorough written comments to each grade (between 5 and 10 sentences for each criterion).
- *The other panel members* must submit an assessment, grading all criteria and giving *short* written comments to each grade (between 2 and 3 sentences for each criterion).

Alternatively, when larger panels are needed (15-30 applications per panel):

- *The principal assessor* must submit an assessment, grading all criteria and giving thorough written comments to each grade (between 5 and 10 sentences for each criterion).
- *The second assessor* must submit an assessment, grading all criteria and giving *short* written comments to each grade (between 2 and 3 sentences for each criterion).
- *The other panel members* must grade all criteria but are *not* required to give any written comments.

The individual assessments should be submitted no later than 1 week prior to the panel meeting.

When all referees have submitted their individual assessments, they are made available to the rest of the panel. To prepare for the discussions in the meeting, we ask you to read the other referee's assessments.

Panel meeting discussion

During the meeting, the panel will discuss each one of the applications and, based on the discussions and the individual assessments, agree on a unified assessment.

For each application, the *principal assessor* will start the discussion by giving a brief review of the proposal and his/her evaluation. The other panel members will then provide their comments. The members of the panel should strive to reach consensus.

Completing and submitting the final assessments

The principal assessor is responsible for updating the electronic assessment form to reflect the panel's unified assessment of the application. The written assessment serves as an important feedback to the applicant.

It is important that the text written justify the grades given, and it must be consistency between the text and the grades.

The final assessment forms should, be completed and submitted during the meeting.

The assessment criteria and scale of grades

We ask you to assess the projects with respect to the three criteria Excellence, Impact, and Implementation. The panels are *not* asked to assess whether the grant application is relevant for the call for proposals beyond this. As illustrated in ***Figure 1***, this will be done by the Research Council after the panels have finished reviewing all proposals.

1. EXCELLENCE
The extent to which the proposed work is ambitious, novel, and goes beyond the state-of-the-art

- Scientific creativity and originality.

- Novelty and boldness of hypotheses or research questions.

- Potential for development of new knowledge beyond the current state of the art, including significant theoretical, methodological, experimental or empirical advancement.

The quality of the proposed R&D activities

- Quality of the research questions, hypotheses and project objectives, and the extent to which they are clearly and adequately specified.

- Credibility and appropriateness of the theoretical approach, research design and use of scientific methods. Appropriate consideration of interdisciplinary approaches.

- The extent to which appropriate consideration has been given to societal responsibility, ethical issues and gender dimensions in research content.

- The extent to which appropriate consideration has been given to the use of stakeholder/user knowledge.

2. IMPACT
Potential impact of the proposed research
- The extent to which the planned outputs of the project address important present and/or future scientific challenges.
- The extent to which the planned outputs of the project address important present and/or future challenges for the sector(s).
- The extent to which the competence developed, and planned outputs of the project will provide the basis for value creation in Norwegian business and/or development of the public sector.
- The extent to which the planned outputs of the project address UN Sustainable Development Goals or other important present and/or future societal challenges.
- The extent to which the potential impacts are clearly formulated and plausible.

Communication and exploitation

- Quality and scope of communication and engagement activities targeted towards relevant stakeholders/users.
- The extent to which the partners are involved in dissemination and utilisation of the project results.

> **Impact – please note:**
>
> *Regarding "potential impact": The description of the potential impact should be project specific and related to the planned research, and not general elaborations on the benefits of research in a wider context.*

3. IMPLEMENTATION
The quality of the project manager and project group
- The extent to which the project manager has relevant expertise and experience and demonstrated ability to perform high-quality research (as appropriate to the career stage).
- The degree of complementarity of the participants and the extent to which the project group has the necessary expertise needed to undertake the research effectively.

The quality of the project organisation and management
- Effectiveness of the project organisation, including the extent to which resources assigned to work packages are aligned with project objectives and deliverables.
- Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks, ensuring that all participants have a valid role and adequate resources in the project to fulfil that role.
- Appropriateness of the proposed management structures and governance.
- Appropriateness of the partners' contribution to the governance and execution of the project.

Implementation - please note:

Regarding assessment of the project manager: The Research Council of Norway is a signatory to the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)](). Therefore, we kindly ask you to bear in mind the following when assessing applicants' CVs:

- *Do not use journal impact factor to evaluate the quality of the applicants' previous work.*

- *Be sensitive to legitimate delays in research publication and personal factors that may have affected the applicant's record of outputs.*

Regarding assessment of the project group: Please note that you are not to assess the qualifications of candidates for doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships. The applicants have been instructed not to specify candidates for such positions in the application or submit their CV's.

When evaluating the appropriateness of the allocation of tasks in the project, it is important to also assess the tasks and resources allocated to the collaboration partners.

SCALE OF GRADES

It is fundamental to the process that the scale of grades is used according to its definition. Consistent use of the scale across all panels secures equal treatment of topics and thematic areas.

Grade	Defining characteristics
7	**Exceptional** The proposal addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion exceptionally well. Shortcomings are not present, or only very minor.
6	**Excellent** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Only minor shortcomings are present.
5	**Very good** The proposal addresses the criterion very well. A small number of shortcomings are present.
4	**Good** The proposal addresses the criterion well. A number of shortcomings are present.
3	**Fair** The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are a number of significant weaknesses.

2	**Weak** The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
1	**Poor** The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

Scale of grades - please note:

The mark 7 – Exceptional – is only intended for proposals that address a criterion in a way that is outstanding, i.e., truly exceptional proposals that are normally very rare. These proposals are of the absolutely highest quality. The proposals have no shortcomings, or such shortcomings are clearly irrelevant, with respect to the elements that are considered for the criterion.

General guidelines for writing the assessments

All reviewers are kindly asked to follow these general guidelines:

- Make sure that your grades are in line with your comments.
- Use dispassionate, analytical and unambiguous language.
- Use grammatically correct, complete, clear sentences with no jargon.
- Do your best to formulate critical comments as constructive feedback that the applicant can use to improve their application.
- Avoid using "I" or "my" etc. in assessments of applications discussed by the panel. The final assessment must be worded in a way that makes it clear that the panel jointly has agreed on the text.
- Avoid self-declaration of insufficient expertise (personal or panel) or non-confidence in the proposal.
- Avoid reference to the applicant age, nationality, gender, or personal matters.
- Avoid any direct comparison with any other proposals.
- Avoid any reference or comparison with previous proposals.
- Avoid comments that merely give a description or a summary of the proposal.
- Avoid dismissive statements about the Project Manager, the proposed science, or the scientific field concerned.

Examples of good vs. poor comments

POOR COMMENTS MERELY ECHO THE SCORE	GOOD COMMENTS EXPLAIN IT
The innovative aspects of the proposed research are poor.	*This proposal is not convincingly innovative in X and it does not properly take [xxx] into account.*
POOR COMMENTS ARE AMBIGUOUS	**GOOD COMMENTS ARE CLEAR**
The resources for the project are unrealistic.	*The project is overambitious, given the complexity of the activity proposed and the duration of the proposed work.*
POOR COMMENTS ARE VAGUE AND SUB JECT TO INTERPRETATION	**GOOD COMMENTS ARE PRECISE AND FINAL**

	The management plan is inadequate. It does not include a clear description of overall responsibility for the activities; it also lacks a risk management plan.
We think the management is probably inadequate.	
POOR COMMENTS ARE INACCURATE AND PROVIDE AN OPENING FOR A COMPLAINT *There is no discussion of a dissemination strategy. The supervisor is not experienced.*	**GOOD COMMENTS CLOSE THE QUESTION** *The proposal fails to address the dissemination strategy at the appropriate level of detail.* *The supervisor does not demonstrate in the proposal an adequate level of experience in this field.*
POOR COMMENTS INCLUDE WORDS LIKE… *Perhaps, think, seems, assume, probably …*	**GOOD COMMENTS INCLUDE WORDS LIKE…** *Because, specifically, for example …*

Source: *MSCA-IF Evaluation step by step. Manual for evaluators 2018*.

Attachment 1

The main requirements in the call(s)/thematic area or topic(s).