

GUIDELINES FOR FOREIGN EXPERTS OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

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Managing Authority for the Operational programme Research and Innovation

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1. Introduction

1. The Research Agency (**hereinafter referred to as "Agency"**) as the Intermediary Body (**hereinafter referred to as „IB“**) for the Operational Programme Research and Innovation (**hereinafter referred to as „OP R&I“**) applies a two-stage selection process for projects in specific objectives 1.1.3, 1.2.1 and 2.1.1. Firstly, at the stage of preparing for the submission of the grant assistance (**hereinafter referred to as "Grant Application"**) a draft of the Research and development plan (**hereinafter referred to as „R&D plan“**) will be assessed. Secondly, after the submission of the Grant Application the expert evaluation stage of the process will take place during which full-featured projects will be assessed.
2. As part of the first phase, prior to the Grant Application being submitted to the Agency by the Applicant, the drafted R&D plan will be assessed by foreign experts - professionals, thus essentially ensuring high quality and excellence of the R&D plans submitted. Moreover, the involvement of foreign experts has the potential to advance the implementation of research and development projects. For the Agency as well as for the applicant, the R&D plan assessment by a foreign expert constitutes an initial management tool set to eliminate and/or minimize or to take into account issues, negative influences and other matters relating to the project so as to ensure later success of the Grant Application.
3. The foreign experts' role will be to assess the submitted R&D plans before their final versions are submitted to the Agency by the Applicants.
4. All R&D plans shall be assessed by at least two foreign experts concurrently in three areas:
 - a) contribution of the proposed R&D plan to the objectives and results of the OP R&I;
 - b) the proposed method of the project implementation;
 - c) the administrative and operational capacity of the applicant.
5. The output of the assessment of each foreign expert is an opinion paper / report concerning the R&D plan and his recommendations for the R&D plan's modification.
6. If the two foreign experts do not reach a conformable overall conclusion during their assessment of the R&D plan the Agency shall ensure an assessment of the R&D plan is conducted by a third foreign expert whose assessment will then be critical in determining further actions.
7. The foreign expert shall elaborate an opinion paper / report on the R&D plan based on An agreement on the establishment terms of the L/C.

2. Background and the main procedural aspects of the R&D plan assessment

1. The objective of the R&D plan assessment, prior to it being submitted to the Agency as part of the Grant Application, is a professional, objective and transparent valuation of the need and appropriateness of the R&D plan, its readiness and overall contribution in the context of the areas in which the R&D plan is assessed as well as, where relevant, draft measures for R&D plan's amendment.
2. General principles for the assessment of the R&D plan are based on the factual perspective of the Project cycle management method. The basic starting point for assessing a R&D plan is to identify possible deviations from the OP R&I objectives and make recommendations for possible plan amendments based on which the Applicant shall submit a Grant Application to the Agency.

3. The form of the R&D plan is the key document, submitted by the Applicant to the Agency on the basis of the call for proposals of Grant Applications, in order to demonstrate compliance with the conditions for the issuance of reports on the R&D plans.
4. R&D plan clearly states who submitted it, what kind of project is the Grant to be provided for, who will implement the project and what objectives will be achieved by implementing the project.
5. Based on the nature and extent of possible identified deviations by the expert in the assessed R&D plans and by taking into account all assessed areas this document proposes two types of recommendations:
 - a) *Substantial recommendations*, i.e. recommendations based on which it is utterly essential to change the R&D plan;
 - b) *Recommendations of less substantial nature*, i.e. recommendations which are only meant as suggestions for R&D plan's modifications - mostly formal issues, typos, mathematical errors etc.
6. Substantial recommendations are such recommendations which significantly affect the nature and parameters of the R&D plan or the fulfilment of the conditions set out in the call for Grant Application.
7. Adoption of measures by the Applicant that arise from the expert's Substantial recommendations may be assessed by the Agency as part of the project selection process.
8. *Substantial recommendations* are considered to be such which are formulated particularly in case when:
 - a) There is an overall discrepancy of the R&D plan with the assessed areas;
 - b) The R&D plan is not based directly on the present situation and the needs of the relevant research and development area, or it is not complementary and does not follow up on the research activities already carried out in the past by the applicant and his partners involved in the project;
 - c) The R&D plan does not clearly show an effort to act within the frame of international research activities;
 - d) There is a low potential identified within the R&D plan and low emphasis on entry and implementation of activities within the framework of relevant international activities, networks and institutions;
 - e) There is a low level of originality and innovativeness of the proposed R&D plan;
 - f) There is a low level of elaboration and quality of the R&D plan, insufficient clarity and a low level of logical flow of processes and declared objectives;
 - g) the assessment of the R&D plan obviously shows that the degree of interconnection between the available research capacities of individual scientific and technological sectors (public, academic, business, non-profit) is low or very limited;
 - h) the R&D plan is without clearly declarable benefits in terms of attracting and retaining world-class researchers in the applicant's organization / partners.
9. Recommendations of less substantial nature are such recommendations that do not fundamentally affect the nature and parameters of the R&D plan or the fulfilment of the conditions set out in the call for Grant Application.
10. Recommendations of less substantial nature can but do not have to be mentioned in the foreign expert's report. However, in case that they are present in the report they become mandatory for the Applicant same as the Major recommendations.
11. Recommendations of less substantial nature are considered to be such which are formulated particularly in case when:
 - a) the R&D plan is overly general;
 - b) the length of time needed for project implementation is too long;
 - c) too many preconditions exist for a successful realization of the project;
 - d) there is an evident but not sufficient formal description of the R&D plan's concordance with the institute of Research and development excellence (high content quality of the R&D plan);

- e) the way in which R&D plan presents the uniqueness and innovativeness rate is very good, but there are still possible further improvements;
 - f) the manner of how to actively participate in international activities is very vague and is described in a too general fashion in the R&D plan;
 - g) the R&D plan has a clearly formulated structure (solution phases) and financial backing, with logically sequenced parts and clearly stated goals, it has step-by-step solutions and the application impacts, BUT the common practice is contrary to such a proposal;
 - h) the described interconnections of available research capacities of individual scientific and technological sectors (public, academic, business, non-profit) contain only minor errors;
 - i) the proposed implementation team is incomplete and/or inadequate from the point of view of capacity and expertise;
 - j) there are witting errors, calculation errors and other obvious inaccuracies.
12. If a foreign expert identifies any of the issues mentioned in article 6, section 2, he/she is obliged to indicate them while at the same time giving recommendation for the declared issues.
13. The foreign expert formulates his/her finds and recommendations (substantial or of less substantial nature) into the form that is the annex number 1 of this document.
14. The Agency will provide for a clear audit trail within the project dossier of the R&D plan in relation to the foreign expert's proposed recommendations and amendment measures carried out by the Applicant pursuant to the rules for retaining documents as defined in the Procedures manual of the IB.

3. Administration of the R&D plan assessment

1. The initial data input for the start of the R&D plan's assessment process is the receiving of the R&D plan by the foreign expert.
2. A foreign expert will assess the R&D plan by applying the principles set out in section 2, taking into account:
 - a) information stated in the R&D plan;
 - b) requirements arising from the OP R&I;
 - c) guidelines defined in this manual;
 - d) conditions defined in the Call for Grant applications;
 - e) other relevant information, accomplishments, experiences and positive practice within the assessed area.
3. All identified issues by the foreign experts always provide a clear and objective basis for recommended modifications concerning the R&D plan.
4. A foreign expert will send complete documentation concerning the assessment to the Agency whereby the documentation includes the following:
 - a) applicants R&D plan;
 - b) identified issues/deficiencies and recommendations – 2 original copies;
 - c) foreign expert's report – 2 original copies.
5. A foreign expert will send all documentation referred to in article 4 to the Agency within 10 working days of receipt of the R&D plan.

4. Annexes

Annex no. 1 - Foreign expert's Assessment report regarding the Research and Development plan

Foreign expert identification

Research and Development plan Assessment report

Foreign expert _____

Based on the assessment of the submitted Research and Development plan

Applicants identification	
Research and Development plan identification code	
Call for R&D plan application code	

finds, that the Research and Development plan was examined based on all of the submitted information and documents and informs the Applicant that in regard with their Research and Development plan an

Assessment report was issued.

Main purpose of this Research and Development plan Assessment report (Foreign expert identification) is (are) the following recommendation(s), also stated in the annex of this report, that is/are intended to be taken into account in preparing the final R&D plan:

Area	Overall assessment	Conclusion
a)		
b)		
c)		

Location: _____, date/...../20.....

.....
(name, surname, position and signature of the foreign expert)

Annex: findings and recommendations

Area	no.	Weakness	Recommendation	Deficiency level of importance	Measures implemented
a)	1.	(filled out by Expert)	(filled out by Expert)	Substantial / less substantial (filled out by Expert)	(filled out by Applicant)
a)	n.				
b)	1.				
b)	n.				
c)	1.				
c)	n.				