

EXPERT EVALUATORS BRIEFING

Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic Component 9



[RECOVERY
AND RESILIENCE]
PLAN









CALL: Large projects for excellent researchers

https://www.vyskumnaagentura.sk/en/hodnotenie-09i03-03-v03

This presentation contains the information necessary for expert evaluation in the call Large projects for excellent researchers.

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General information

Terms

Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic (RRP)

More information about Slovak RRP available here:

https://www.planobnovy.sk/site/assets/files/1019/rrp_summary.pdf

Intermediary

Research Agency - an entity performing parts of the executor's tasks on the basis of a special contract. According to the contract concluded with the executor, the Research Agency is responsible for the implementation of the call in which project applications, on evaluation of which this presentation is focused, were submitted.

Executor

Organizational unit of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic - **VAIA**. The executor is responsible for the implementation of the selected part of the RRP. VAIA is responsible for the implementation of Component 9 of the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Project assessment manager (PM)

Employee of the Research Agency who is a contact person for evaluator.

eGRANT

An online system used for the project application evaluation.



Terms

Evaluator

A person who, based on and in accordance with the terms of the contract with the Research Agency and the instructions of the Research agency, expertly assesses the submitted project applications.

Co-evaluator

An evaluator that is participating in an evaluation proces with other evaluators.

Individual evaluation report (IER)

Official document containing individual evaluation and evaluators' score of application. It contains scores for each criteria within the three sections of application: "Excellence", "Impact", "Implementation".

Project

Detailed plan of activities with a clearly defined goal, financial plan and technical aspects of implementation presented in the form of a Project application.

Project application

Project proposal that is submitted by an applicant and is subject of evaluation by an evaluator. Project application consits of project description and a budget. Synonym of the term Project proposal.



Terms

Deliverables

Tangible or intangible direct output of an activity within the project (e.g. product, report, study, etc.), which is created directly during the duration of the project or at its end. Outputs are defined by the applicant, each work package must have at least one output defined. Mandatory outputs are defined within the call.

Milestones

Control point during the implementation of the project. A milestone can indicate the completion of a significant project deliverable or an activity that is an important intermediate step in the completion of the deliverable or outcome. Milestones are defined by the applicant.

Monitored data

Data that will be reported within project reporting and monitoring. The selection of monitored data is either left to the applicants (while we recommend including the largest possible spectrum of the offered possibilities) or there are predefined monitored data that must be included in the project. Monitored data must be expressed quantitatively for the entire duration of the project.

Outcomes

Expected effects of the project that will contribute to changing the existing state. The results of the project should bring a change that will take place during or shortly after the end of the project.



Component 9 of the Slovak Republic

- RRP of the Slovak Republic consists of 18 components.
- Allocation of the Component 9 is more than 600 million EUR
- More information about RRP: https://www.planobnovy.sk/site/a ssets/files/1019/rrp_summary.pdf

Component 9 - More efficient governance and strengthening RDI

- Executor of the Component 9 Government Office of the Slovak Republic (VAIA Research and Innovation Authority)
- Intermediary:
 - Research Agency
- Executor and intermediary are responsible for calls within the Component 9 and respective expert evaluation processes.





Guiding principles and Code of Conduct

Guiding principles of the evaluator

 Code of conduct which is an integral part of mandate contract is available here:

https://www.vyskumnaagentura.sk/en/ho dnotenie-09i03-03-v03

Binding document for evaluator - Code of Conduct

- Experts are required to perform the assessment to the highest professional standards and within agreed deadline.
- Experts have to read the whole project application carefully before completing the evaluation.

Independence

You are evaluating in your personal capacity, you represent neither your employer, nor your country.

Accuracy

You make your judgment against the official evaluation criteria in the call and based on the data in the project application and nothing else.

Impartiality

You must treat all applications equally and evaluate them impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicant.

Objectivity

You evaluate each project as submitted, not its potential if certain changes were to be made.

Consistency

You apply the same standards and assessment to all projects.

Punctuality

You deliver agreed outputs (evaluation reports) on time.



Conflict of interest

 Declaration on exclusion of conflict of interest is available here:
 https://www.vyskumnaagentura.sk/en/h odnotenie-09i03-03-v03

- Conflict of interest includes situations where impartial and objective performance of duties may be influenced, disrupted, or endangered, especially due to family or emotional reasons, political or state affiliation, economic interest, or any other direct or indirect personal interest.
- The evaluator is obliged to immediately inform the Research Agency of any conflict of interest identified during the performance of the order, including competition with another project application evaluated under the same call, in which the evaluator may have a conflict of interest.
- If it is discovered during the evaluation that the evaluator knowingly concealed an existing conflict of interest, he/she will be immediately excluded from the evaluation without the possibility of reimbursement of evaluation-related costs.

Confidentiality

- The evaluator is obliged to maintain confidentiality regarding all information and documents, in any form (e.g. printed, electronic), that were made available to him in writing or orally in connection with the performance of the contract. This obligation continues during the validity of the contractual relationship and after its termination.
- In case project applications are made available to the evaluator electronically and he/she works in his/her own or other suitable premises, he/she is personally responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all documents and electronic files and for returning, deleting, or destroying all confidential documents and files after the evaluation is completed.



Individual evaluation

General information about the call

- The call will support top research teams led by excellent researchers from Slovakia and abroad, who will carry out their research at research or innovation institutions in Slovakia.
- The aim is to improve the quality of research and innovation in strategically defined themes. It will support large projects of fundamental and applied (industrial) research carried out by excellent researchers and their teams in strategically defined areas - in line with the smart specialisation domains defined in the Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation of the Slovak Republic (RIS3):
 - Innovative industry for the 21st century
 - Mobility for the 21st century
 - Digital transformation of the Slovakia
 - Healthy society
 - Healthy food and the environment

General information about the call

The objectives of the call:

- ✓ Attract or retain and support individual excellent researchers and their teams in the implementation of research in Slovakia.
- ✓ Support the **creation and development of the research team** of an excellent researcher (principal investigator).
- ✓Improve the equipment.
- ✓ Increase competitiveness in engaging in the European projects.
- Applicant **must identify an excellent researcher (principal investigator)** at the career stage of R3 or R4, as demonstrated by his/her CV.
- The results of the implementation of the project must be specific deliverables, which must be proportional to the project budget and achievable during the project implementation period.
- There must be milestones during the whole project implementation period, which must be clearly defined, appropriate, realistic and achievable in relation to the proposed activities.

Evaluation of project application

• Shortened English version of the call with annexes relevant for evaluators available here:

https://www.vyskumnaagentura.sk/en/hodnotenie-09i03-03-v03

Evaluator evaluates project application which consists of a project description (maximum 30 pages) and a budget.

- Before starting the evalution, evaluator familiarise with the following documents:
- Call (Shortened English version for evaluators)
- Annex no. 1 of the project application

 Budget
- Annex no. 6 of the project application Project description (template with the predefined structure)

Note: Shortened English version of the documents for applicant are available on this link: https://vaia.gov.sk/en/2023/10/05/large-projects-for-excellent-researchers/

Documents for applicant can contain more information necessary for the preparation of the project application, for evaluator the Shortened Englished version for evaluators is intended.



Evaluation criteria

- Evaluation scores are awarded for the criteria, and not for the different aspects in each criterion.
- You provide a score in the range from 0-5 to each criteria based on your comments.
- Maximum score for a project application is 15 (3 criteria/ max. 5 points each).
- 0.5 scores are possible.
- Scores must pass the individual threshold (minimum 3 points in each criteria) AND the overall threshold (minimum 10 points) to be eligible for funding.

Evaluation modality

Individual evaluation by 3 international evaluators

3 individual evaluations

Average of the individual scores in each criteria (the average of scores of each criterion is calculated from the evaluations of the evaluators according to which the given criterion met the conditions (scored at least 3 points).

Ranking of projects according to their score.

Individual evaluation

Read the application and evaluate it against the evaluation criteria. Do not discuss it with anybody else!

Complete Individual evaluation report (IER) and send it to Project manager (PM)

Wait for the feedback from PM:

If the EIR do not address all aspects or has some shortcomings, you will be approached by PM to update it.



If the IER is complete in all aspects PM confirms its acceptation.

Note: Individual evaluation report of each evaluator will be send to applicant after the end of the evaluation process.



General information about evaluation

- Main communication tool will be eGRANT (phone communication/other online communication tools can be used as a complentary tool for communication upon agreement). Access to the online system together with instructions for log in will be sent to the evaluator after signing the contract.
- Evaluator will always have one contact person project assessment manager (PM) of the intermediary
- In case of questions/doubts contact us: odborne.hodnotenie POO@vyskumnaagentura.sk
- To ensure independence, we do not disclose the name of the evaluators of a specific project application.
- The summary list of all evaluators (without identification with concrete project application) may be published.
- Evaluators are selected from the European Commission's database and are from different EU countries.



Quality standards for evaluation reports

Quality standards for evaluation reports

The basic quality principles:

- ✓ Evaluation report must be fair, accurate, clear and complete, addressing all the criteria and aspects.
- ✓ Evaluators cannot assume information that is not explicitly provided.
- ✓ The comments must reflect the scores and give reasons for scores.
- ✓ Evaluation report should be complete but avoid additional elements comments must address all aspects (sub-criteria), but only these.
- ✓ Information relevant for a specific award criterion may appear in different parts of the application and experts must take all of it into account when scoring the award criterion.
- ✓ The evaluation of one criterion should NOT influence the evaluation of another criterion. In particular, the same shortcomings should not be referred to under different criteria (no double penalisation).
- ✓ At the end of the assessment, experts give overall comments on the application as a whole. In the comments, experts must provide a thorough analysis of the application highlighting its relative strengths and weaknesses.

Quality standards for evaluation reports

Comments must reflect the assessment of the criteria in the frame of what is requested in the call.

Avoid factual mistakes. Whenever factual statements are made, they should be explicitly verified.

Comments should be precise and definite.

Comments must not be discriminatory, offending or inappropriate.

Comments should consist of clear, concise and complete sentences.

Comments must not be based on assumptions and should not suggest ignorance or doubt.

Comments must not contain recommendations or suggestions to improve the project.

The comment for a criterion, taken as a whole, must be consistent with the meaning of the score that is awarded for that criterion.

Quality standards for evaluation reports – HOW (NOT) TO

DO NOT

- Avoid self-declaration of insufficient expertise, or nonconfidence in the application! (e.g., I do not understand, I am not certain etc...)
- Avoid intensely emotional language (e.g. verbs as: believe, think, like, agree, doubt, etc.)!
- Avoid making broad generalization (be careful in using the words like all, always, must, never, and every)!
- Avoid ambiguous phrases!
- Avoid reference to the applicant's age, nationality, gender, personal matters or any comments that may reveal your identity!
- Avoid exclusive language suggesting that particular race, gender or age group are gifted in a particular area!
- Avoid too short comments! (e.g. The application does not fulfil evaluation criteria 1.")
- · Avoid incomplete sentences or abbreviations!
- Avoid unnecessary comment, which does not add valuable advice; avoid comparison with other applications!
- Avoid comments that give a description or a summary of the application!
- Avoid any reference or comparison with previous evaluations!
- · Avoid referring to marks in the comments!
- Explain shortcomings, but do not make recommendations!

DO

- If you do not feel comfortable with an evaluation, just DECLINE the task!
- In case of any doubt please contact PM!
- Use inclusive language! Preferably use gender-neutral language wherever possible.
- Use grammatically correct, complete, clear sentences with no jargon!
- Write full sentences (no bullet points)!
- Provide polite comments and justifications!
- Use dispassionate, analytical and unambiguous language!
- Critical comments should be constructive.
- Replace vague expressions with explicit language: your comments will be clearer and more meaningful

Time framework for delivery of reports

Individual evaluation report

Large-scale project (30 pages)

10 calendar days from receiving documents for evaluation by evaluator

The specified delivery times may vary by mutual agreement between the principal and the contractors depending on the number of assigned project applications at the same time.



Evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria

3 EVALUATION CRITERIA:

Evaluated project description must have the predefined structure – it will **always** consist of the three criteria:

- 1. Excellence
- 2. Impact
- 3. Implementation.

This criteria will be further divided into evaluation aspects. Further information on evaluation aspects for this call are in the next slides.

The evaluator takes into account only first 30 pages of the project description. If the project description has more pages, all the additional pages will not be taken into account by

If the application does not have the predefined structure (all 3 mandatory parts – excellence, impact, implementation) the evaluator will reflect on that in an evaluation score – s/he will give 0 points for the missing criterion.

Excellence

- ✓ Relevance of the project and its linkage and contribution to the objectives and areas targeted by the call.
- ✓ Relevance of the problems/needs at which the project is aimed.
- ✓ The project goes beyond the currently available technical solutions, procedures, products, etc. ("beyond the state of the art").
- ✓ Compliance of the project with strategic documents at national and/or European level and linking the activities of the project to the European Research Area.
- ✓ Compliance of the project with smart specialisation domains in the Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation of the Slovak Republic.
- ✓ Scientific quality/excellence and experience of the principal investigator.
- ✓ Appropriateness, timeliness and relevance of the proposed methodology to the objectives of the project.
- Quality of use and management of research data and outputs within the project, integrating the principles of open science.

DNSH – Do no significant harm principle

• All activities and projects within Component 9 must be carried out in compliance with relevant EU and national environmental legislation. No measure in this component do significant harm to environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852. All funding schemes shall comply with DNSH principles requiring technology neutral investment at the level of applications and excluding potentially damage areas such as fossil fuels, including downstream use.

Assessment of the DNSH principle:

- Description of how the project methodology complies with the 'do no significant harm' principle will be a part of the project application and it will be subject of assessment by evaluator (in the criterion "Excellence", part "methodology").
 - Applicant shall show that their project will not carry out activities that make a significant harm to any of the six environmental objectives of the EU Taxonomy Regulation.

Evaluators will not score applications in relation to their compliance with the DNSH principle, evaluators indicate whether they identified potential activities that might be non-compliant with the DNSH principle. It will be stated as a question for individual evaluator in the Individual evaluation report.

To ensure compliance of the call with the DNSH Technical Guidance (2021/C58/01), the following activities and assets are excluded from the support:

- activities and assets related to fossil fuels, including downstream use;
- ii. activities and assets under the EU Emission Trading System (ETS) achieving projected greenhouse gas emissions that are not lower than the relevant benchmarks;
- iii. activities and assets related to waste landfills, incinerators and mechanical biological treatment plants; and
- iv. activities and assets where the long-term disposal of waste may cause harm to the environment.

Impact

- ✓ The credibility of the proposed procedures, the likelihood that the project will achieve the
 expected results and will have the expected impact.
- ✓ The significance of the anticipated impact on the given area of knowledge and the scientific community, on the economy, on society, on the environment.
- ✓ Adequacy of expected results and impacts of the project qualitative and quantitative.
- ✓ The appropriateness and quality of the proposed measures to maximise the results and impact of the project.
- ✓ The quality of the proposed IPR management strategy for project results (if relevant).

Implementation

- ✓ Quality and efficiency of the project plan, feasibility of planned activities
- √ The coherence and logic of the work packages and the adequacy of the allocated resources, the adequacy of the proposed milestones and deliverables.
- ✓ Coordination and management of the project.
- ✓ Quality of project management and processes.
- ✓ Quality of ensuring gender equality and equal opportunities within the project.
- ✓ Estimation of implementation risks, quality of proposed measures.
- ✓ The capacity and tasks of the applicant; description how an applicant has the necessary expertise and material and technical equipment.

Interpretation of scores

0	Unsatisfactory project. The project in the given criterion achieves a very low quality and solves a problem of little or no importance. In the qualitative assessment of individual aspects of the criterion, the project shows fundamental deficiencies. Project application and project quality is insufficient in the given criterion or the evaluation criterion cannot be evaluated due to incomplete information.
1	Poor project. The project in the given criterion achieves low quality and solves a problem of low importance. In the qualitative assessment of the individual aspects of the criterion, the project shows fundamental deficiencies and needs substantial modification or improvement.
2	Below average project. In the given criterion, project achieves lower quality and solves a problem of medium importance and contains a few important elements that could be improved. In the qualitative assessment of individual aspects of the criterion, the project shows several shortcomings.
3	Good project. In the given criterion project achieves good quality, solves an important problem and contains several important elements that could be improved. In the qualitative assessment of individual aspects of the criterion, it shows several shortcomings.
4	Very good project. Project in the given criterion achieves high quality, solves a problem of high importance and significance. In the qualitative assessment of individual aspects of the criterion, project shows only minor shortcomings.
5	Excellent project. Project achieves excellent quality in the given criterion, it solves a problem of very high importance and significance. In the qualitative assessment of individual aspects of the criterion, the project shows no or only marginal deficiencies.

Additional questions

You can find additional question in the IER regarding following aspects:

Have you identified areas or activities of the project that could potentially conflict with the DNSH principle (do no significant harm)?

You respond yes or no if you identified any potential conflicts with the DNSH principle and if yes, specify potential areas of conflict.

Is the researcher/principal investigator from the R3-R4 category?

You respond yes or no whether selected category of researcher corresponds to his/her level of career and expertise according to European framework for research careers - https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/europe/career-development/training-researchers/research-profiles-descriptors

Does the declared type of research correspond to the proposed project activities?

You respond yes or no whether declared category of type of research (independent, fundamental, industrial) correspond to the proposed project activities?

Is the project in compliance with at least one of the domains of the RIS3?

You respond yes or no whether the project is in compliance with at least one of the domain of the RIS3 - https://mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Research-and-innovation-strategy-for-smart-specialisation-of-the-Slovak-Republic-2021-2027.pdf





Budget evaluation

- Evaluation of proposed budget is a part of the evaluation of **each project application**.
- Evaluate the cost estimates on the basis of your knowledge and professional experience.
- You evaluate the detailed budget table under the criterion "Implementation":
 - Small shortcomings (e.g. slightly overestimated or underestimated costs) in the budget lead to appropriate lowering of the score in the criterion "implementation".
 - Significant shortcomings (e.g. a flawed budget structure or a clearly overestimated or underestimated costs) in the budget lead to lowering score under the implementation criterion under the threshold (lower than 3 point in a criterion) which leads to project rejection.

Expert evaluator evaluates:

- Coherence of the grant requested in relation to the proposed activities and outputs (cost-effectiveness, efficiency and value for money principle)
- Relevance of budget items/costs to implementation of the project (Is requested cost item
 relevant and needed for successful implementation of the project and delivering its results?) mainly
 in the case of fixed assets purchased from the project.

State aid

Funding rate of projects:

- 100 % of costs for applicants not considered an undertaking (according to the individual state aid test)
- 25% 100% of costs for applicants considered an undertaking (according to the individual state aid test). Funding rate (aid intensity) depends on the size category of the applicant (micro, small, medium or large enterprise) and the type of research (basic, industrial, experimental).
- For applicants that are considered an undertaking, state aid is provided under the State aid scheme.
- Verification whether applicant is an undertaking and whether the conditions resulting from the state aid scheme are met will be carried out by PM, evaluator do not assess this aspect.

Eligible costs

Non-undertakings

Direct costs

- ✓ **Salary/staff costs** (unit cost 3 684 Eur/person-month for 100% of the working time on the project for eligible positions)
- ☐ Setting up and/or upgrading research infrastructure procurement of tangible and intangible fixed assets research infrastructure used exclusively or almost exclusively for non-economic purposes
- Expenditures on construction work and construction modifications (only if they are necessary for the installation of the infrastructure acquired under the project)
- Expenditures on knowledge and patents purchased or licensed from outside sources on an arm's length basis
- ☐ Expenditures on obtaining, approving and protecting patents and other intangible assets
- □ Travel refunds
- ☐ Consumables, other goods and services
- ✓ Indirect costs set at a flat rate up to 7% of eligible direct costs.

Undertakings

- ✓ Direct costs
 - Salary/staff costs (unit cost 3 684 Eur/person-month for 100% of the working time on the project for eligible positions)
 - Depreciation of capital assets (tangible and intangible) within the scope and period of its use within the project
 - Expenditures on knowledge and patents purchased or licensed from outside sources on an arm's length basis
 - □ Travel refunds
 - □ Consumables, other goods and services
- ✓ Indirect costs set at a flat rate up to 7% of eligible direct costs.



Mandate contract and remuneration

- Remuneration will be paid based on the Mandate contract that will be signed with each evaluator.
- Evaluator can evaluate several application (also in different calls) within one Mandate contract.
- The actual remuneration will be calculated based on the tasks carried out and according to Methodology for the remuneration of experts.
- Remuneration is determined depending on the complexity of the project application and the difficulty of its evaluation - parameters such as the amount claimed in the project application, the complexity of the project activities, schedule, work packages, the complexity of the project budget, the number of partners in the project, the maximum number of pages of the project application, etc. are taken into account.
- Evaluation outputs must be delivered on time and in the corresponding quality for remuneration to be paid.

Model mandate contract is available here:

https://www.vyskumnaagentura.sk/en/hodn otenie-09i03-03-v03

Methodology for evaluator remuneration is available here:

https://www.vyskumnaagentura.sk/en/hodn otenie-09i03-03-v03

 The remuneration shall be paid to the bank account of the Mandatary, upon receipt of the evaluation and confirmation of the fulfilment of the Order by the Mandator.

Note: The contract does not constitute an employment agreement. Any payment received on the basis of the Mandate contract is not exempted from national taxes and you are obliged to ensure compliance with your domestic legislation on taxes and social.

Methodology for the remuneration of experts

- Each project application and work task within the expert evaluation process has a different time requirement.
- Each work task was assigned a number of work units that correspond to the normal working time required to perform the given task.
- The unit rate for performing a work task is bindingly set at EUR 45/work unit.
- 10 work units correspond to 1 working day, which represents a reward of EUR 450.

Classification of calls according to its scope

Type of a project according to its scope	Scope of the project application	Call
Large-scale project	30 pages of project description + budget	Large projects for excellent researchers

Preparation for evaluation						
Task difficulty	Total sum for the work task (EUR)	Output	Notes			
	135	Familiarization with the principles of evaluation, familiarization with the content of the call.	In case the evaluator evaluates several projects in one call, this task will be rewarded only once.			
Preparation for evaluation - reading the evaluation materials			In case the evaluator evaluates in several calls within one investment, this work task will be remunerated for each call separately.			
			The payment of this reward is conditional on the preparation and delivery of at least one evaluation output.			
Individual evaluation						
Task difficulty	Total sum for the work task (EUR)	Output	Deadline			
Large-scale project	270	Individual evaluation report	10 calendar days from the delivery of the documents for evaluation			

Calculation of remuneration of evaluator

Calculation of remuneration of evaluation of large-scale project:

- Preparation for evaluation reading the evaluation materials 3 units 135 EUR
- Delivering individual evaluation 6 units 270 EUR



Useful documents and links

- European framework for research careers (definition of categories R1-R4)- https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/europe/career-development/training-research-profiles-descriptors
- Definition of technology readiness levels (TRL) https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/annexes/h2020-wp1415-annex-g-trl_en.pdf
- General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) https://competition-policy.ec.europa.eu/state-aid/legislation/regulations-en
- Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation of the Slovak Republic (RIS3) https://mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Research-and-innovation-strategy-for-smart-specialisation-of-the-Slovak-Republic-2021-2027.pdf
- EDP Summary Report on SK RIS3 2021 https://mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Suhrnna-sprava-z-procesu-edp-k-strategii-SK-RIS3-2021 anglicka-verzia fin.pdf
- National Strategy for Research, Development and Innovation 2030 https://vaia.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/National-Strategy-for-Research-Development-and-Innovation-2030.pdf
- National Strategy for Open Science https://otvorenaveda.cvtisr.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/National-Strategy-for-Open-Science-2021-2028.pdf