



CRIS Out-Back Fellowship Programme Terms of Reference for the Peer-Review and Interview Panel

1. Introduction

To enable the success of the funding calls for short-experienced Researchers, the CRIS Board of Trustees supported the contract of Madri+d evaluation service, for the Peer-Review, for the written proposal Evaluation Phase, and for give support in selecting the Interview Panel, for the Interview Phase.

2. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference details the guide and code of conduct of the evaluators, ensuring that the Evaluators perform its tasks in compliance within the principles of independence, confidentiality, commitment to good governance and transparency.

In order to achieve these objectives and ensure the effective functioning of the Evaluators Panels, these Terms of Reference will define the functioning of the Evaluation Panels or any related working groups; the roles and responsibilities of members and invited experts; and other relevant activities related to the smooth functioning of the Evaluators. These terms will also define the roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat Lead.

3. Principles

The Evaluators from Peer-Review and Interview Panel shall perform their tasks in compliance with the principles of excellence, independence, confidentiality, commitment to good governance and transparency.

Scientific Excellence

The Evaluators will make decisions for the assessment of projects and candidates based on the best available data, scientific knowledge and methodology available at the time of preparation of an opinion.

The principle of excellence refers to the performance and outcome of the entire process. It refers in particular to the scientific quality of both the peer-review and the interview evaluation. Both the written proposal and the interview process should adhere to the mandate of the call. The process, conclusions and contents of the review process will be conducted with clarity and transparency such that any communication of the conclusions of the review process will have been perceived to be of the highest integrity and credibility.

Independence

The scientific advice must not be influenced by any consideration other than the scientific assessment of both the benefits and risks associated with the research proposals.

This principle implies, in particular, independence from any external economic or political interests, but also from bias related to political, economic, social, philosophical, ethical or any other non-scientific considerations.

The principle of independence refers to the organization and results of the process, including in particular the independence criteria, conditions and arrangements for the participation of members.

Confidentiality

The scientific advice delivered by the Evaluators is sometimes based on confidential information. Participants and observers of the work of the Evaluators Panels shall respect the principle of confidentiality and professional secrecy, and to exercise due diligence in not sharing confidential information acquired as a result of the work of the Evaluators, meetings or other activities related to the application of these Rules of Procedure.

Commitment

The members shall commit themselves to act independently in the public interest and to contribute actively to the work of the Panels. They shall set an exemplary conduct in all activities related to the Evaluation Panels.

Transparency

The meaning of the scientific advice, the way conclusions were drawn, the limits of their validity and the relevant uncertainties must be clear and understandable for users, relevant stakeholders and the public.

Equally, the organization and process leading to the scientific advice, as well as their rationale, must be presented in a clear and understandable manner. Openness, dialogue and collaboration with other bodies and third parties should also contribute to transparency.

4. Functioning of the Peer-Review and Interview

Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

CRIS Operations Team shall elect a Chair and a Vice-Chair for the first interaction based on their academic excellence, scientific background and commitment with the peer-review and interview panel's objectives.

The terms of office of the Chair and Vice-Chair shall be 2 years, renewable. The names of the Chair and the Vice-Chair shall be made public.

Role and replacement of Chairs and Vice-Chairs

The Chair of the Peer review and interview panels, in collaboration with the Secretariat, shall be responsible for:

- planning the work of the Panel
- chairing, steering and moderating the discussions at meetings and drawing conclusions
- advising CRIS on any selection of additional experts, if needed
- taking the necessary measures to ensure that the deadline for delivery of the opinion is respected
- examining the Declarations of Interest, deciding, in consultation with the Panel and in agreement with CRIS, the relevant conclusions and action in order to ensure the effective application of the independence requirements
- monitoring the conformity of the activities of the Panel with all the relevant procedural methodological and substantive requirements, principles and standards established or deriving from these Rules of Procedure
- representing the Panel.

If the Chair is not in a position to fulfil his/her function, he/she shall be replaced by the Vice-Chair or, failing that, another member chosen in common accord by the members.

In case of conflict of interest of the Chair with an item on the agenda, he/she shall be replaced by the Vice-Chair or failing that another member chosen in common accord by the members.

The Vice-Chair shall support the Chair in fulfilling his/her responsibilities. The Chair shall consult the Vice-Chair on a regular basis and as appropriate on emerging issues requiring urgent decisions that could not be postponed for discussion at plenary meetings.

Evaluation process of the CRIS Out-Back Fellowship Programme

The evaluation shall consist of the background information submitted by candidates to a specific CRIS Out-Back Fellowship Programme.

There are two previous stages of evaluation. First Administrative review is about the eligibility of all applications received, rejecting those that do not meet the criteria published in the terms and conditions of the call for applications. At Second Evaluation, candidates will be screened by the Peer-review and interview panel who will score the applications. Each candidate will be reviewed by two different experts.

Based on scoring, the 20% top-scored candidacies of the programme will go on to the interview stage.

The allocation of candidates to each member of the Peer-review shall be performed by Madri+d and supervised by the Secretariat based on the expertise of the members. In case any conflict

of interest with the proposed candidates (e.g., Applicant being a member of their research group or institution), the evaluator shall inform Madri+d for project substitution. Madri+d shall inform the Secretariat and the Chair without delay of the allocation of the candidacies.

Members may ask Madri+d to clarify the candidate documentation and/or to supply additional information.

Members of the Peer-Review Panel will receive the candidacies assigned

Each member shall evaluate the assigned candidacies and complete the Evaluation Form of the written proposal evaluation.

Selection of external experts to participate in the interview

A shortlist of suitable candidates (20% top-scored at the written proposal evaluation phase) shall be established by the Secretariat on the basis of the required fields of expertise needed to complete the assigned tasks as defined by the Interview Panel.

External experts designated to participate in the evaluation process or meetings may be selected from a specific request for experts launched by the Programme Operations Team, in collaboration with Madri+d and its expert's database.

In case any conflict of interest with the proposed candidates (e.g., Applicant being a member of their research group or institution), the evaluator shall inform CRIS for not being involved in the interview and evaluation of the candidate. Secretariat shall inform the Chair without delay of the conflict of interest.

After the Interview Phase, the Chairs of the Peer-review and Interview Panels, in collaboration with the members, as appropriate, shall be consulted by the Secretariat to select the candidates from the shortlist. The selection process shall be properly recorded in order to document the transparency of the process. The final decision remains to the CRIS Board of Trustees based on the assessment of the independence of the experts.

Meetings (Notice, Agendas, Deadlines, Minutes, Access)

The Secretariat shall establish with the Peer-Review and Interview Panels a schedule for the Scientific Committees' plenary meeting for the forthcoming calendar year.

As a general rule, the Secretariat shall confirm meetings of the Peer-Review and Interview Panels at the earliest possible date but no later than twenty working days before the date of the meeting and shall give notification of cancellation not less than five working days before the date of the meeting.

Meetings of the Peer-Review and Interview Panels may be called at short notice according to the urgency of the matters.

The Secretariat shall prepare the draft agenda of meetings of the Peer-review and interview panel and circulate it to members as soon as possible and no later than two weeks before the date of the meeting.

Wherever possible, documents, including reports and draft opinions prepared by chair or members, shall be made available to the Secretariat for distribution to the members at the latest one week before the meeting, where they will be discussed.

Chairs and members entrusted with the drafting of documents, reports or draft opinions, shall ensure that this requirement is complied with.

The agenda shall be adopted at the beginning of the meeting taking account of any agreed amendments.

Meetings of the Peer-review and interview panel and their working groups shall not be open to the public.

The Secretariat of the Peer-review and interview panel shall prepare draft minutes of plenary meetings. The minutes shall contain at least:

- the list of participants and apologies for absence,
- declarations of interests by participants concerning their independence, including the relevant details, the action taken and its rationale. Information registered in the minutes must be adequate and relevant for the purpose of management of conflict of interest,
- the adopted agenda,
- a summary of discussions, including important minority stand points,
- and agreed actions,
- a record of decisions taken, and opinions adopted,
- any vote against or abstentions during voting and the reasons of their vote.

The minutes shall not mention the individual positions of the members during the Panel's deliberations.

The draft minutes of the plenary meetings shall be circulated to the members of the Peer-review and interview panel for comments. They should be adopted not later than one month.

Correspondence relating to the Panel and their members shall be addressed to the Secretariat, for the attention of the Chair using e-mail.

Voting Rules

The Peer-review and interview panel shall adopt their opinions, rapid advice notes, memoranda and/or position statements by an absolute majority of their members.

Meetings are considered in force when the absolute majority of the members of the Panel are present.

Members who have resigned or whose membership has been terminated shall not be taken into account for the calculation of the majority required.

In case any conflict of interest with any of the candidacies (e.g., applicant being part of any Member's research group), the member shall not participate on the evaluation and voting process of that candidacy.

5. Role of the Secretariat

The Secretariat shall be responsible for providing administrative support necessary to facilitate the efficient functioning of the Panels, to monitor compliance with the Rules of Procedure, particularly in relation to the requirements for excellence, independence, commitment, confidentiality and transparency, to ensure communication on the Panel's activities, publication of the opinions and other relevant documents. Specific duties shall include in particular:

- a. ensuring best use of resources and the planning to meet priorities and time limits,
- b. ensuring that requests for opinions comply with the relevant requirements,
- c. coordinating the administrative, scientific and technical work carried out within the Panel,
- d. assisting the Chair of the Committee in the preparation of the draft opinions in conformity to the principles of excellence, independence and transparency and the other relevant principles and standards referred to in these Terms of Reference,
- e. monitoring compliance of members with participation criteria and informing the CRIS Operations Team as appropriate.

6. Representation of the Peer-Review and Interview Panels

The Secretariat may invite the Chair and Vice-Chair to represent the Peer-Review and Interview Panels in external events, contacts, missions, etc., as appropriate.

Other members and experts may be invited by the Secretariat to attend meetings, etc. in relation to the work of the Peer-Review and Interview Panels but shall not speak on behalf of the Peer-Review and Interview Panels, unless explicitly requested to do so by the Secretariat.

7. Interview meeting

The interview meeting shall be organized by the Secretariat.

The objective of such a meeting is the discussion of the evaluation performed by members on the finalist projects submitted to the CRIS Out-Back Fellowship Programme Call.

Members of the Interview Panel will receive the finalist candidacies, and their score in the second evaluation performed by the Peer-review panel, at least three weeks before the interview meeting.

The 20% top-scored candidacies will be subject to online interviews by members of the Interview Panel.

After discussion of the interview panel about final candidates, members will vote the final selected candidates.

Final candidates selected by the interview panel shall be published as soon as possible on the CRIS website.

This interview meeting may involve experts carrying out similar tasks.

Meetings at the initiative of the Peer-review and interview panel shall be organized by the Secretariat subject to consultation of the CRIS Operations Team, availability of funds and adequate planning.

8. Travel expenses and special allowance for members and experts, and chairs

Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by members and experts in connection with Mentoring meetings and other activities are reimbursed in accordance with the provisions in force at the CRIS Board of Trustees.

ANNEX I: Declaration of Acceptance and Commitment

ANNEX II: Declaration of Interests

ANNEX III: Declaration of Confidentiality