

MSCA COFUND: Impressions of an FP Evaluator

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Outline

- 1 The COFUND Evaluation Cycle
- 2 COFUND Instrument
- 3 Observations / Dos and Don'ts

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The Process

MSCA COFUND proposals evaluated in two phases

- » remote phase
- » central phase

A typical timeline of the two phases (relative to closing date):

Remote Phase

- » -5 months: willing to evaluate?
- » +1 week: rejection / invitation to assist with evaluations
- » +3 weeks: contract signed
- » +4 weeks: web briefing (highlighting new aspects)
- » +4 weeks: “remote phase (evaluator)” begins
 - » lasts ~3 weeks
 - » assignment of 7-8 proposals
 - » provide numerical rank with justifications
 - » individual evaluation report (IER)
- » +7 weeks: “remote phase (rapporteur)” begins

Remote Phase (contd.)

- » +7 weeks: “remote phase (rapporteur)” begins
 - » from allocated proposals, draft 1-2 summaries
 - » consensus reports (CRs) based on 4 IERs
 - » divergence of numerical ranking used later
 - » CR is starting point for discussions that take place centrally
- » +9 weeks: “central phase” begins

Central Phase

- » +9 weeks: “central phase” begins
- » panel meets during 1 week in REA building, Brussels
 - » each proposal discussed in dedicated 1-hour meeting
 - » based on draft CR (= judgements of 4 evaluators)
 - » present at meeting:
 - » 4 evaluators
 - » 1 vice-chair (“super-evaluator”)
 - » REA Project Officer (possibly)
 - » Independent UN Observer (possibly)
 - » previous numerical scores thrown away
 - » agreed numerical score based on discussion
 - » rapporteur writes a CR that summarises the meeting’s opinions
 - » all evaluators sign off on report (ESR)
- » Finally...

Central Phase (contd.)

- » Friday Afternoon: an ordered (ranking) list comprising all eligible proposals is presented to all evaluators at plenary
- » evaluators exit the process
- » REA / Commission start at top of ranking list and descend, funding all proposals until money runs out

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Objective

Stimulate excellence in researchers' training & career development

- » International Mobility
- » Interdisciplinary Training
- » Intersectoral Training
- » Open, transparent, merit-based selection & recruitment
- » Attractive working and employment conditions

Expected Impact

Researcher Level

- » Augment and diversify the set of skills, both research-related and transferable, that will lead to improved employability and career prospects both in and outside academia
- » Forge new mind sets and approaches to research and innovation work through interdisciplinary and intersectoral experience
- » Enhance networking and communication capacities with scientific peers, as well as with the general public, that will increase and broaden the research and innovation impact

Organisation Level

- » Increasing the attractiveness of the participating organisation(s) towards talented researchers
- » Boosting research and innovation output among participating organisations
- » Strengthening of international, intersectoral and interdisciplinary collaborative networks that will reinforce the organisation's position and visibility at a global level, but also at a regional/national level by helping them become key actors and partners in the local socio-economic ecosystems

Expected Impact

System Level

- » Aligning of practices and policies in the context of the EU Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), enhanced implementation of the Charter and Code and the EU Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training
- » Supporting the practice of Open Science through targeted training activities
- » Increase in international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility of researchers in Europe
- » Improvement in the working and employment conditions for researchers in Europe at all levels of their career
- » Strengthening of Europe's human capital base in research and innovation and structuring of a stronger European Research Area
- » Increase in Europe's attractiveness as a leading destination for research and innovation
- » Better quality research and innovation contributing to Europe's competitiveness and growth

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What can go wrong? Excellence

- » “The quality of information to be distributed to applicants is poorly described”
- » “The program ... co-application of fellows and their host laboratories, as implied by the evaluation criteria specified. The pre-selection process described and the power of supervisors to decide in ex-aequo cases may strongly limit the fellows’ freedom of choice and the independent, merit-based evaluation process, ... a significant weakness”
- » “The selection of experts and the evaluation procedures are incompletely described: the database feeding the expert panel is not specified and independence of expert evaluators is not fully guaranteed, as they partly seem to come from collaborators; Col cases not specified”

What can go wrong? Excellence (contd.)

- » “Arrangements for consensus meetings are not properly described. This casts doubt on the capacity of the beneficiary to organize an independent evaluation process”
- » “Call dissemination channels are rather poorly described”
- » “No proactive gender balance strategy is in place”
- » “Given the scope of research and the ambitions of the proposed program, the potential for cross-sectoral mobility is not fully exploited, and it is not clearly explained whether and how fellows will be integrated in the existing interdisciplinary networks”

What can go wrong? Impact

- » “Regional, national and international impacts of the fellowship are described only in generic terms”
- » “It is not described how the program coordinator will work sustainably towards the principles set out in Charter & Code in systematic way, internally or with partners contributing to the program”
- » “Provisions for regular career development, monitoring and guidance are not described”

Trends

- » Standard rises all the time
 - » almost all proposals (from my recent samples) appear to have assistance of professional writers
- » Score of below 88-90% unlikely to be funded
- » No clear “right size” for consortium
- » Budget not an issue – unless unjustified

Some Suggestions

- » Ensure each evaluation criterion is addressed
 - » Writer's fatigue
 - » A common strategy: proportionally allocate the permitted 30 pages
- » Stay between the lines
 - » 30 pages means just that...
 - » ...required information should not be in appendix
 - » font size and other tricks

