

RTI CALLS: EVALUATION GUIDELINES

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These guidelines provide both reviewers / reviewing jurors and applicants with an overview of the evaluation procedure within the framework of the RTI calls of the RTI Strategy 2027 of the State of Lower Austria. The processes should thus be as transparent and comprehensible as possible. Any additional detailed regulations and the evaluation criteria can be found in the respective call documents.

EVALUATION PROCEDURE

All applications submitted on time will first undergo an internal formal review by the Gesellschaft für Forschungsförderung NÖ (GFF). The GFF reserves the right to have uncritical formal errors corrected by the applicants, provided this is possible and appropriate in the specific case. The assessment is the responsibility of GFF and there is no entitlement to a subsequent correction of formal errors.

For each call, the GFF assembles a jury of at least three independent external experts in the respective thematic areas / fields of action. A diversification of the experts / jurors by gender, age and region should be taken into account as far as possible.

The expert review is carried out by independent external experts (partly incl. jury members) selected by GFF. The project selection takes place in the course of a jury meeting. Project rankings are created on the basis of the expert opinions. The reports are then compared and discussed.

The project rankings can be changed by the jurors in justified cases if:

1. There has been a structural disadvantage in the evaluation of individual project applications, which distorts the overall evaluation and ranking (bias; e.g. different evaluation standards of the experts or strongly divergent reports)
2. Project applications have the same or only slightly different total number of points and the reordering results in a greater balance in the project selection with regard to (a) thematic orientation, (b) distribution of the funded institutions and / or (c) gender distribution.
3. the project applications address the thematic orientation or the field of action of the call to different degrees. The jury can prioritize project applications that were rated well in the expert review and that particularly strongly address the thematic orientation or the field of action of the call.

In addition, individual reviews can be excluded by the jury if they do not meet the quality criteria below. It is up to the jury to decide whether a further expert opinion must be obtained in this case or whether the existing expert opinions are sufficient. The final project ranking and the project selection are made by unanimous decision, whereby abstentions (e.g. in the case of bias) are possible. The jury will justify its decisions accordingly.

The supervisory board of GFF decides on the funding based on the jury recommendation.

QUALITY OF REVIEWS

Within the framework of peer review procedures, it is important that, in addition to the basic principles of research evaluation¹ with regard to research ethics and research integrity, certain quality criteria are adhered to by the reviewers / reviewing jurors in order to increase the objectivity of the project selection and to ensure the acceptance of the funding decision on the part of the applicants.

The GFF checks the compliance with these quality criteria and, in the event of non-compliance, the reviewers / reviewing jurors are given the opportunity to remedy the deficiencies in the reviews. If this is not done in an appropriate time and form, the reviews will be excluded from the evaluation process.

¹ Practical Guide to Integrity and Ethics in Science (page 32ff; Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, October 2020)

1. Technical expertise

Reviewers must have proven expertise in the research area of the proposal. In the case of interdisciplinary research projects, it is possible that individual reviews relate to sub-areas of a project. In any case, it must be possible to derive a coherent overall assessment from the sum of all reviews, and there must be no gaps in the assessment.

2. Independence and impartiality

Reviews may only be drawn up by persons who have no doubts about the independence and impartiality of the expert opinion. If there is a bias on the part of the jurors, they will abstain from voting on the project in question.

Possible grounds for bias are:

- Kinship, personal ties or conflicts
- Close scientific cooperation, e.g. implementation of joint projects or joint publication within the last 3 years
- Direct scientific competition with own projects or plans
- Affiliation with the same scientific institution or imminent transfer of the reviewer to the institutions involved in the funding application and vice versa
- Teacher/pupil relationship, unless independent scientific activity has existed for more than 10 years
- Employment dependency within the last 3 years
- Involvement in ongoing or recently concluded appeal procedures
- Simultaneous or past activity in advisory bodies of the institutions involved in the funding application, e.g. scientific advisory boards
- Personal economic interests in the decision on the funding application
- Competitive relationship or common economic interests, e.g. joint management of a company
- Participation / involvement in a funding application that was submitted in the same call of the GFF and is therefore in direct competition with the funding application to be evaluated.

Any concerns beyond this must be clarified with GFF.

3. Consideration of the framework conditions of the call

Each call is characterised by different framework conditions, objectives and evaluation criteria. The reviewers and jurors are expected to obtain an overview of these basic provisions and to incorporate them into their evaluations. All call documents will be made available to the experts and jurors by GFF.

4. Appreciative formulations and objectivity

Especially in the case of negative evaluations, it is important to use respectful language and factual arguments.

5. Specific reviews

Only reviews that give the impression that the reviewers have thoroughly examined the funding application in question will be included in the jury's decision-making process. Both the positively evaluated points and the points of criticism must be formulated specifically. Overly general / generic (positive and negative) evaluations will not be considered in the project selection process.

In addition, applicants themselves have the option to exclude up to three reviewers for each application. These can also be anonymous reviewers from previous funding applications whose names are not known to the applicants. If the excluded reviewer is a member of the jury for this call, he/she will not participate in the review of the project application and will abstain from voting at the jury meeting when it comes to the evaluation and ranking of this funding application.

REMUNERATION

GFF grants its experts a compensation for each review. The condition for the payment of the allowance is the timely preparation of the expert opinion and compliance with the above quality criteria of the review.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All funding applications, correspondence, expert opinions and the identity of the experts are confidential. The task of reviewing may therefore only be carried out personally and may not be delegated to third parties without the approval of GFF. The scientific content of the funding application may not be used for personal or third-party scientific purposes. Reviewers are requested not to contact the applicants directly. The reviews will be made available to the applicants exclusively in anonymous form.