

PRIN 2020

GUIDELINES FOR EXPERTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Italian Ministry for Universities and Research (MIUR) supports public research based on criteria of quality and merit evaluated through a peer review process.

1.2. The PRIN (Research Projects of National Interest) Program provides funding for public research projects with a view to promoting the Italian research system, strengthening cooperation between universities and research organizations, and encouraging national participation in initiatives of the European Union's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

1.3. (Specifications). The 2020 PRIN call consists of a single funding procedure with the opening of further annual funding windows announced via subsequent notices confirming the continuing availability of funds for 2021 and 2022, and introducing any changes to the regulations set out in the PRIN 2020 call, including those relating to the present guidelines.

1.4. Project proposals can be submitted to the following three main research domains identified by the European Research Council (ERC):

- Life Sciences
- Physical and Engineering Sciences
- Social Sciences and Humanities.

These domains are subdivided into the sectors listed in Annex 1 to the call.

1.5. Three evaluation panels, one for each ERC research domain, are set up in order to select the projects to receive funding. Each evaluation panel has between five and fifteen members (depending on the number of sectors in each research domain).

2. EVALUATION PROCEDURE

2.1. Each project proposal is allocated to the evaluation panel pertaining to the primary ERC domain indicated by the Principal Investigator (PI).

The scientific evaluation of the projects is assigned by each evaluation panel to three anonymous external reviewers that the panel selects from the MIUR's Register of Expert Peer-Reviewers for Italian Scientific Evaluation (REPRISE) or from the databases of experts engaged by the European Commission, in accordance with the criterion of scientific competence and through a web-based application managed by CINECA.

2.2. External experts may only be selected following the procedure described in section 2.1 above. Experts perform their duties remotely using suitable web-based tools.

2.3. (Conflict of interest and recusal obligations). Experts must not be involved in any way or form, and in any case pursuant to the principles laid out in Article 51 of the Italian Civil Code, with the preparation of projects submitted to the PRIN 2020 call for proposals (hereinafter referred to as the "call").

2.3.1. Similarly, if an expert has, in the five years prior to the publication of the call, been employed or contracted by the same university or research institution with which the PI or head of local units participating in the project submitted under the call is affiliated, they must refrain from performing any activities relating to the evaluation procedure.

2.3.2. An expert must also refrain from performing activities relating to the evaluation procedure of any project in which the PI or a local unit head has co-authored scientific publications with said expert in the five years prior to the publication of the call.

2.3.3. The definition of conflict of interest set out in section 2.3.2 above does not apply where the publication involving the expert and the PI or a local unit head was co-authored by 100 or more authors.

2.3.4. Persons employed or contracted by universities that are, at the same time, associated by partnership obligations with the university/public research institute with which the PI or unit heads are affiliated may not serve as experts.

To constitute a conflict of interest in this case, only partnership obligations that give the respective holder the right to vote and to stand for election in the governing bodies of the partner institution apply.

2.3.5. Upon their nomination, each expert member publishes on the CINECA website a declaration of absence of grounds for exclusion and compliance with ethical principles and confidentiality (pursuant to articles 46 and 47 of Presidential Decree no. 445 of 28 December 2000), together with a photocopy of a valid identity document.

False declaration of absence of grounds for exclusion is a criminal offence and is punishable by law pursuant to article 76 of Presidential Decree no. 445/2000.

2.3.6. In any event, experts must refrain from making decisions or carrying out activities relating to their duties in any situation of actual or potential conflict of interest.

2.4. Experts appointed under the PRIN 2020 call are not appointed to serve on successive evaluation panels set up following each additional notice relating to annual funding windows.

2.5. If an expert does not accept the appointment to serve as scientific evaluator within seven days of being contacted, they receive a second invitation. If they do not accept the second invitation within seven days, they are automatically excluded from the expert selection procedure.

If an expert fails to perform their tasks within four weeks from their appointment, they receive a reminder from the evaluation panel. If the expert fails to complete their evaluation within two weeks from the reminder, they will be mandatorily replaced by the evaluation panel.

2.6. (Scientific evaluation). During each step of the scientific evaluation, experts work independently and remain anonymous to each other and to the project proponents being evaluated.

Each project is assessed according to the following criteria:

EVALUATION CRITERIA	SCORE
<p>1. Quality of the research project – scientific merit and innovative nature of the project from an international standpoint – with particular regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Clarity and pertinence of the project objectives b) Relevance and originality of the proposed project within the specific scientific area c) Methodology adopted and coherence of the project, including the specific contribution of local units (if any) d) Positioning of the project based on the state of the art in the specific scientific area. 	<p>Total: 40</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 10 b) 10 c) 10 d) 10
<p>2. Composition of the research team, feasibility and appropriateness of the project – scientific merit of the research team, feasibility of the work plan, and appropriateness of requested funding – with particular regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Excellence of the PI, local unit heads (if any), and the entire research team b) Ability to carry out the proposed project (competence, composition, and complementarity of the entire research team) c) Organization of the project with regard to the proposed objectives, expected timescales its completion, and resources required (tools, size of research team, management) d) Coherence of the time commitments of members of the research team, congruence and relevance of the spending plan with the objectives and structuring of activities. 	<p>Total: 40</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 10 b) 10 c) 10 d) 10
<p>3. Social impact of the project – with particular regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Challenges addressed by the research project in terms of its impact on technological innovation, industrial applications, economic growth or the solution of social problems, safeguarding of cultural or environmental heritage, including interdisciplinary approaches b) Effectiveness of the dissemination actions of the research project and its outcomes; impact of the project on the scientific community and society in light of the objectives defined by the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. 	<p>Total: 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 10 b) 10
TOTAL SCORE	0–100

2.7. (Score thresholds). Each project is subject to a maximum score threshold of 100 and a minimum score threshold of 75, identified for each research domain.

Any project scoring below the minimum threshold of 75 is not eligible for funding.

2.8. Each external expert, working independently and remaining anonymous to the other experts, compiles an evaluation form for each project using the dedicated IT platform managed by CINECA, indicating the project's strengths and weaknesses, and awarding a score for each of the criteria indicated in the table in section 2.7 accompanied by an explanatory comment, according to the following parameters:

- 0–5 insufficient: critical and/or too many weaknesses
- 6–7 sufficient: weaknesses in several parts of the project
- 8 good: some moderate weaknesses
- 9 very good: very convincing, minor weaknesses
- 10 outstanding: fully convincing, no weaknesses.

2.8.1. The explanatory comment for the score awarded, of a minimum of 500 to a maximum of 700 characters, must address each of the three criteria indicated in the table in section 2.6 above. In order to justify their score, the expert answers, or writes a general response to, the questions contained in the following evaluation form:

EVALUATION FORM	
1. Quality of the research project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) To what extent are the objectives of the project clearly and pertinently structured?b) What are the points of originality and innovative aspects of the project?c) To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?d) To what extent do the objectives go beyond the state of the art in the specific scientific area?
2. Composition of the research group, feasibility and appropriateness of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) To what extent have the PI and local unit heads (if any) demonstrated scientific excellence?b) To what extent is the project feasible and appropriate in terms of competence, composition, and complementarity of the research team?c) To what extent is the project consistent with the proposed objectives, expected timescales for its completion, and resources required (tools, size of research team, management)?d) To what extent are the time commitments of the members of the research team and the spending plan consistent and congruent with the objectives and activities of the project?
3. Social impact of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) To what extent does the project address the challenges of the research field in terms of its impact on technological innovation, industrial applications, economic growth or the solution of social problems, safeguarding of cultural or environmental heritage, including interdisciplinary approaches?

b) To what extent does the project propose actions to disseminate its outcomes? What impact can it have on the scientific community and society in light of the objectives defined by the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation?

2.9 Having completed their scientific evaluation, each expert uploads their evaluation form on the platform managed by CINECA.

2.10 The evaluation panel compares the scores awarded by the three experts and calculates the final score of each individual project.

2.11 (Conclusion of the procedure). At the end of the scientific evaluation procedure, the evaluation panel responsible for each research domain draws up a ranked list of the projects admitted by sector, examines the budget requirements indicated in each project, and determines the appropriate cost and funding (calculated according to the rules in Annex 2 to the call).

3. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

3.1 Experts are bound by the strictest confidentiality regarding the entire selection process, both in terms of the projects and their evaluation. In addition to the provisions set out in section 2.3, experts must not find themselves in any situation of incompatibility or conflict of interest with regard to the project they are appointed to evaluate.

3.2 Experts must not copy, quote, or otherwise use and/or disclose to any third party, including colleagues, students, post-doc scholars, or other researchers, the content or data relating to the projects being evaluated.