



European Research Council

# **ERC Grant Schemes**

## **Guide for Peer Reviewers**

**Applicable to the ERC  
Starting Grants and Advanced Grants  
(Work-Programme 2012)**

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## 1. Introduction

The selection of scientific and scholarly proposals for funding by the European Research Council (ERC) is based strictly on peer review evaluation with excellence as the sole criterion. ERC uses a typical panel-based system, in which panels of high-level scientists and/or scholars make recommendations for funding either autonomously or based on the feedback of specialists external to the panel – the remote referees.

### The "Rules"

The ERC Scientific Council (ScC) has established a document, adopted by the European Commission, namely the "ERC rules for the submission of proposals and the related evaluation, selection and award procedures for indirect actions under the Ideas Specific Programme of the Seventh Framework Programme (2007-2013)" ("Rules")<sup>1</sup>. This document defines a number of high-level requirements on the processes implemented by the ERC.

### The Work-Programme

The ScC has also established the Work-Programme (WP) for 2012<sup>2</sup>, which defines the parameters of the Call for Proposals for ERC Starting Grants and Advanced Grants. More specifically, it defines the call deadline(s), the call budget, it stipulates that a two-step peer review procedure will be applied following a single submission of a full proposal, it sets the framework for budgetary decisions, and it specifies the evaluation criteria.

### This document

This document complements the abovementioned legal texts. It specifies in more detail the reviewing process and its inputs and outputs, and it defines the responsibilities of the participants in the process. It details the "Rules" in a number of important issues, such as: clarification of the methodology as regards inter-disciplinary proposals; practical guidelines for the management of conflict of interest; clarification of inter-panel and inter-domain issues.

## 2. Domain structure, panel structure and streaming

The ERC has the mandate to implement a bottom-up, investigator-driven approach to research funding. Consequently, the principal objective of the peer review system is to select the best science, independent of its discipline and independent of the particularities of the review panel structure. The panel structure is, in essence, no more than an operational instrument.

Indeed, proposals of an interdisciplinary nature which cross the boundaries between different fields of research, pioneering proposals addressing new and emerging fields of

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<sup>1</sup> Commission Decision 2010/767/EU of 9 December 2010 amending Decision C(2007) 2286 on the adoption of ERC Rules for the submission of proposals and the related evaluation, selection and award procedures for indirect actions under the Ideas Specific Programme of the Seventh Framework Programme (2007 to 2013), OJ L 327, 11.12.2010, p. 51-70

<sup>2</sup> Adopted by the European Commission Decision C(2011) 4961 of 19 July 2011



research or proposals introducing unconventional, innovative approaches and scientific inventions are strongly encouraged. These proposals are assessed within the primary review panel. Nevertheless, when an additional expertise is necessary reviewers from other panels may be involved as well.

A single submission of the full proposal is followed by a two-step evaluation process. Initially the applicant decides to which primary panel he/she submits the proposal. The review of the proposals is then conducted in two steps by review panels.

In this context, the ERC has established a panel structure consisting of 25 panel titles, grouped in three discipline domains, covering the entire spectrum of science and scholarship in the remit of the ERC:

- Social Sciences and Humanities (SH)
- Life Sciences (LS)
- Physical and Engineering Sciences (PE)

In defining the panel structure, a forward-looking approach was taken and narrow discipline definitions have been avoided.

The 25 panel titles are accompanied by a list of panel descriptors (i.e. ERC keywords) indicating the fields of research covered by the respective ERC panels. The panel descriptors must always be read and understood in the overall context of the panels' titles and sub-titles.

### **Streaming**

For the ERC Starting Grants Call, the Principal Investigators will be assessed by the evaluation panels as "starters" or "consolidators". The allocation of the proposals to the two streams will be based on the number of years since the award of their PhD, "Starters" being normally those awarded their PhD from 2 up to 7 years prior to the Starting Grant call publication, and "consolidators" being normally those awarded their PhD over 7 and up to 12 years prior to the Starting Grant call publication. However, in making the final streaming decision, panels will also take into account the specific stage of the Principal Investigator's research career at the time of the application based on the information and supporting documents provided. Applicants wishing to be evaluated in a stream different than that corresponding to the years past PhD must make their case in the leadership profile in Part B Section 1 of the application.

## **3. Panel Chairs, Panel Members and remote Referees**

### **The panels**

An ERC panel, for a particular review session, consists of a chairperson plus –around 13 members. The Panel Chair and the Panel Members are selected by the ERC-ScC on the basis of their scientific reputation and following the criteria set up by the Scientific Council Standing Committee on Panels. The Panel Chair and the Panel Members make a significant commitment of their time to the ERC review process. Each panel meets twice to carry out a two-step review of proposals.



**Panel Chairs and Panel Members** perform the following tasks:

1. Familiarisation with proposals of their panel in preparation for the panel meetings.
2. Individual remote review – by electronic means – of a subset of those proposals in preparation for the panel meetings.
3. Participation in the panel meetings.

**Panel Chairs** have additional tasks and responsibilities, while working in close collaboration with the ERC's Scientific Officers of the panel concerned:

1. To chair the panel meetings.
2. To (re-)allocate proposals to review panels and, in the Starting Grants, to the appropriate career stage for evaluation ("starters" vs. "consolidators") according to the relevant WP.
3. To assign proposals to Panel Members (and to remote Referees) for individual reviewing. Panel Chairs will pay particular attention to the rules on conflict of interest and exclusion of experts (e.g. the concerned member of a Panel will be informed by the relevant Panel Chair on a bilateral ground - in the presence of an ERC's Scientific Officer).
4. To ensure the panels produce all necessary deliverables of the required quality standards by the end of the panel meetings, including the ranked lists and feedback to applicants.
5. To attend the Panel Chairs' meeting in order to assess the response to the call for proposals and plan the work of the panel accordingly.

If unable to attend the meeting, Panel Chairs should delegate this task to one of their Panel Members.

The names of the Panel Chairs are publicly available after the call deadline. The names of Panel Members are published at the end of the Call.

### **The remote Referees**

In addition to the Panel Members (who act as "generalists"), the ERC evaluations rely on input from remote Referees. They are scientists and scholars who bring in the necessary specialised expertise. Remote Referees work remotely and deliver their individual reviews by electronic means. They do not participate in panel meetings and normally their involvement is limited to step 2 of the evaluation process. Because of the specialised nature of the work, the demands on the time of individual remote Referees are comparatively smaller (of the order of a day). The names of all remote Referees are made public once a year after the Call closure.

The assignment of remote Referees to proposals is carried out under the responsibility of the Panel Chair in collaboration with the ERC's Scientific Officers. There is no limitation on the participation of any member of the international scientific community to act as a remote Referee, subject to the approval and accreditation of the person in question.



### **The contribution from remote Referees**

In the second step of the review, to take advantage of the best spectrum of specialised expertise, in addition to Panel Members, reviews are typically requested from 2-5 remote Referees who work remotely. All the reviews will then form the basis for the panel discussions.

### **The appointment letters**

In all cases, the relationship between the ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) and the reviewers is defined by a written and signed agreement (the Appointment Letter). Signature of this agreement by the reviewer indicates acceptance of the conditions regarding confidentiality, conflict of interest, and use of personal data by the ERCEA. ERCEA can not make available proposals to a reviewer who has not been officially appointed (i.e. signed the Appointment Letter and, in so doing, agreed to the terms laid down in it including in particular, confidentiality and Conflict of Interest aspects). The template of the Appointment Letter is referred to in the "Rules".

### **Exclusion of independent experts at request of an applicant**

If an ERC Call for proposals allows applicants to request the exclusion of independent experts, this is indicated in the relevant Guide for Applicants. Therefore, the following section does not apply to the ERC Starting Grant Call 2012.

As established in the "Rules", applicants submitting project proposals may request that up to three specific persons would not act as peer reviewers in the evaluation of their proposal. Such a request is made at the time of proposal submission in the Part A (the administrative forms). It has to be accompanied by specific reasons based on clear grounds:

- Direct Scientific Rivalry
- Professional Hostility
- Similar situation which would impair or put in doubt the objectivity of the potential evaluator.

If the person identified is an independent expert participating in the evaluation of a call for proposals, he/she may be excluded from the evaluation of the proposal as long as ERCEA remains in the position to have the proposal evaluated.

Such a request will be treated confidentially by the authorised staff of ERCEA and the concerned Panel Chair. If the excluded expert is a member of the panel, he/she will be informed in confidence about the request concerning him/her.

Additionally, in application of the pertinent regulation on protection of personal data<sup>3</sup>, an excluded expert may be granted access to all data linked to the ground and specific reasons for his/her exclusion in order to provide information which could rectify any inaccurate statement made by the applicant (please, refer to the Specific Privacy Statement provided on the ERCEA website at the following address [http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERCEA\\_SPSS\\_Exclusion\\_of\\_Experts\\_2011%20\(2\).pdf](http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERCEA_SPSS_Exclusion_of_Experts_2011%20(2).pdf)).

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 articles 13 and 14, OJ L8 of 12.1.2011, p. 10



The request for exclusion is accepted by ERCEA as long as the proposal can still be evaluated by other reviewers having the necessary expertise.

## **4. The approach to inter-disciplinary proposals**

Research proposals of a multi- and interdisciplinary nature are strongly encouraged throughout the ERC's schemes. Proposals of this type are evaluated by the ERC's primary panels with the appropriate external expertise where necessary. Given this, it was no longer necessary to establish in the Work Programme 2012 an indicative budget to fund proposals of a cross-panel and/or cross-domain nature, known in previous Calls as "the Fourth domain". Funding for such proposals will come from the regular panels which perform the evaluation.

The initial choice indicated by the applicant when submitting his/her proposal is paramount in determining the panel under which a proposal is evaluated. An applicant who is considering his/her proposal as interdisciplinary (i.e. cross panel or cross domain) can also explicitly mention a second panel in the application form. The broad definition of the panels allows many inter-disciplinary proposals to be treated within a single panel (mainstreaming of interdisciplinarity). During the evaluation process, potentially interdisciplinary proposals (i.e. across panels or across domains) are flagged as such, and the panel may request additional reviews from appropriate members of other panel(s) or additional remote Referees.

### **Responsibility of the panels**

The responsibility to ensure that cross panel/cross domain proposals receive equal and fair treatment rests fundamentally with the panels to which they are allocated. No proposal is allocated to multiple panels, ensuring an equal treatment of all proposals.

The structure of the review criteria, defined in the WP, allows the panels to fulfil this responsibility. In the first step, the review panels can come to clear recommendations on the potential of the Principal Investigator, and the quality of the research proposed, even while recognising that certain scientific aspects of the proposals may not be fully covered by the panel's specialities. The same may be true for proposals that fall entirely within the panel. The panels and Panel Members therefore play a "generalist" role.

## **5. Distribution of budget: main principles**

### **Initial allocation to the domains**

The Work Programme establishes an indicative percentage distribution of the total call budget between the three main research domains.

### **Allocation of indicative budget to panels**

An indicative budget is allocated to each panel, in proportion to the budgetary demand. The budget is calculated on the basis of the cumulative grant request of all proposals to



the panel as a proportion of the cumulative grant request in response to the domain of the call.

For the ERC Starting Grants Call, following the same rationale and in order to assure comparable success rate for the "starters" and the "consolidators", the indicative budget of each panel will be further divided in proportion to the budgetary demand of the proposals submitted in these two categories ("starters" and "consolidators").

## 6. The individual reviews

Individual reviews are carried out prior to panel meetings. Panel Members and remote Referees participate in the individual review stage.

### Minimum requirements

The "Rules" stipulate that each proposal shall be subject to at least three individual reviews. In Step 1, all proposals are reviewed by Panel Members. In case of a high workload, they will be supported by Members of other panels. In Step 2, reviews are carried out by Panel Members (ideally 3) and remote Referees (ideally 2-3).

Each application may be assigned to a "lead reviewer"<sup>4</sup> who introduces the proposal to the panel for discussion and is responsible for drafting the panel comment. The panel comment is part of the "Evaluation Report" which is returned to the applicant as feedback.

The applicant submits the proposal to a primary review panel. If the applicant has indicated a secondary review panel, the primary panel will determine whether the proposal is indeed cross-panel or cross-domain and if necessary may request additional reviews by appropriate Members of other panel(s) or additional remote Referees. If the primary panel decides that the proposal is well within the panel's scope and no additional expertise is necessary then it will only be evaluated by this panel.

### The interpretation of "individual"

During the individual reviewing process, there shall be no discussions of the proposals between reviewers. Moreover, during the remote evaluation of proposals (i.e. before panel meetings) Panel Members should not disclose the proposals assigned for their evaluation to other experts. When a Panel Member considers having insufficient expertise to evaluate any of the proposals he/she received to review, he/she should immediately inform the ERC's Scientific Officers and the Panel Chair for having the proposal timely reallocated to another reviewer.

### Marks and comments

Individual reviewing consists of:

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<sup>4</sup> The 'lead reviewer' is a Panel Member selected from those assigned to evaluate the proposal. A 'lead reviewer' may be assigned to each proposal during the evaluation process. The lead reviewer has the role to briefly introduce the proposal to his/her peers during the panel meetings and draft the panel comment in order to reflect the main points of the panel discussion. The panel comment drafted by the lead reviewer is agreed upon in its final version by all Panel Members.



- Awarding marks for each of the evaluation criteria.
- Providing a succinct explanatory comment substantiating each mark.

### **The importance of marks and comments**

Both marks and comments are critically important as they form the basis of the feedback to the applicant:

- The individual review marks determine the relative position on the list which is the starting point for the panel discussions.

The comments are included in the Evaluation Report, in principle as provided (see also section 12). Reviewers should therefore take care about the formulation of comments in their individual assessments.

### **The nature of the comments**

Comments should be provided at each step by each reviewer for each criterion. They should be of good quality, genuine, succinct but substantial. They should also be impeccably polite.

Comments should take the form of a statement and explanation of key strengths and key weaknesses of the proposal, in the light of the evaluation criteria.

The comments will be reproduced - word for word - in the feedback to applicants.

Reviewers are encouraged to observe the following guidelines:

- Use dispassionate, analytical and unambiguous language.
- Use grammatically correct, complete, clear sentences with no jargon.
- Provide polite comments.
- Critical comments should be constructive and not offensive.
- Avoid self-declaration of insufficient expertise (personal or panel) or non-confidence in the proposal.
- Avoid reference to the applicant age, nationality, gender, or personal matters.
- Avoid making reference to scores in the comments.
- Avoid the use of the first person or equivalent: "I think..." or "This reviewer finds..."
- Avoid any direct comparison with any other proposals.
- Avoid any reference or comparison with previous assessments.
- Avoid comments that give a description or a summary of the proposal.
- Avoid dismissive statements about the PI, the proposed science, or the scientific field concerned.

In case a very large number of proposals is received, some partial standardisation of the comments may be implemented.

Individual reviews have to be submitted in due time to the ERCEA prior to the panel meeting.

### **The range of marks**

Panels and remote Referees will evaluate and mark the proposals according to:



- 1: Principal Investigator, and
- 2: Research project.

Each proposal receives a mark on a scale from 1 to 4 for each of the two above elements. Marks are awarded in integers or halves. Marks range from 1 (non-competitive) to 4 (outstanding). As a general recommendation, it seems reasonable to reserve the highest mark, i.e. 4.0 (outstanding), for the top 10% of proposals, marks 4.0 or 3.5 only for the top 20%, and marks 4.0, 3.5 and 3.0 only for the top 30% of proposals. In all cases, reviewers are requested to base their assessment strictly on the evaluation criteria.

At the end of each evaluation step, the proposals will be ranked by the panels on the basis of the marks they have received and the panels' overall appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses.

While numerical marks from 1 to 4 are used in the remote evaluation phase and serve as a starting point for the panel meetings, the outcome of the panel meeting is expressed as A, B or C marks (see section 10).

### **Review of the grant level**

Panels should only recommend reductions in the level of the requested grant where there are specific recommendations for a particular proposal (i.e. there should be no across-the-board cuts). Recommendations for amendments to the amount granted must be documented and explained in the panel comments for each proposal concerned, based on an analysis of the resources requested to carry out the work.

The appropriate level of budget should be evaluated within the second element of the proposal (the 'Research project') under the heading 'Methodology' which refers to resources. Panels are advised to consider carefully whether recommendations for large reductions may in fact be a reflection of a weak proposal and whether it would be advisable to reject the proposal.

## **7. Conflict of Interest (Col)**

Peer-reviewers should not be put in a situation in which their impartiality might be questioned, or where the suspicion could arise that recommendations are affected by elements that lie outside the scope of the review. To that effect, the ERC has formulated a clear set of rules pertaining to conflict of interest (Col). These rules are incorporated in the Appointment Letter, in the form of the need for disclosure by the reviewer of any actual (disqualifying) or potential conflict of interest regarding the proposals.

In the "potential" case, ERCEA will make a decision whether the situation in question constitutes an actual Col - or whether no Col exists.

### **No individual assessments under Col**

No reviewer shall make an individual review of a proposal if in Col with it. To that effect, on the basis of the information available, the Panel Chair shall avoid making conflicting



assignments of proposals to reviewers. Beyond the measures taken by the ERCEA, reviewers are bound to disclose any Col and will not participate in the discussion or be present when a proposal that places them in Col is being evaluated.

### **Col and panel meetings**

- Any Col must be declared prior to or in the beginning of the panel meeting to all participants at the meeting.
- A Panel Member will refrain from any attempt to influence directly or indirectly the result of the review of any proposal with which he / she has a Col. In particular, such Panel Member will not participate in the discussion, or in any voting related to that proposal. Panel Members should leave the meeting room when detailed discussions or decisions are taking place on proposals for which they have a Col.
- No Panel Member is permitted to contribute to a proposal (neither as a principal investigator nor as a team member) and at the same time to remain an active Panel Member for the same call. In such cases the Panel Member should step down for that round of evaluations. Additional restrictions may be established in the annual ERC Work Programme.

## **8. The criteria**

The criteria express the objectives of the ERC activity at the level of the review. They are, therefore, defined in the applicable ERC Work Programme. There are two types of criteria:

- Eligibility criteria.
- Evaluation criteria.

### **Eligibility criteria**

Eligibility criteria are simple, factual and legally-binding rules. Their interpretation does not involve scientific judgement. Hence, eligibility is not part of the review process. Instead, it is carried out in parallel by the ERCEA. In some (rare) cases, proposals may be declared ineligible during or even after the reviewing process, as their ineligibility can only be confirmed with some delay.

### **Evaluation criteria**

The evaluation criteria are at the core of the review process. The evaluation criteria for each step and their interpretation are described in the applicable ERC Work Programme<sup>5</sup>. All judgement on proposals must be made against the evaluation criteria and these criteria alone.

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<sup>5</sup> The feasibility of the scientific approach is assessed at step 1. The detailed research methodology (timescales and resources included) is assessed at step 2.



The incorrect application of criteria or the application of inexistent or irrelevant criteria for the step concerned is considered a procedural mistake which may lead to a successful redress and justify a re-evaluation of the proposal.

## 9. Preparation and organisation of the panel meetings

### Autonomy of Panel Chairs

Panel Chairs have a high degree of autonomy in the conduct of their meetings, within the "Rules" and the WP: which proposals to discuss in detail, in which order, when to resort to voting and how to vote, etc. The conduct of the meetings will also be influenced by the number of proposals to be reviewed by the panel.

### Re-allocation of proposals to a different panel

Although the initial allocation is based on the expressed preference of the applicant, when necessary, owing to the expertise required for their evaluation, proposals may be reallocated to different panels at the beginning of the evaluation. This reallocation should be done by common agreement of the two Panel Chairs concerned in the main interest of the applicant aiming to ensure a competent and fair evaluation of the proposal.

### The efficiency of meetings and preparation

The ERC attaches great importance to the principle that panel meetings should be efficient. For this reason, preparatory work is carried out in advance of the meeting by electronic means:

1. Panel Members familiarise themselves with proposals in their panel, in order to be able to make high-quality recommendations.
2. In step 1, Panel Members carry out remotely individual reviews of a subset of submitted proposals.
3. In step 1, each Panel Member is asked to recommend potential remote Referees for an in-depth review of those proposals he/she recommends to be retained for step 2.
4. In step 2, Panel Members carry out remotely individual reviews of a subset of retained proposals.
5. In step 2, remote Referees contribute to the evaluation process with individual reviews prepared remotely.

The prior individual reviewing stage increases the efficiency of evaluation in two ways:

1. By creating a preliminary ranking of proposals. This allows panel discussions to focus on those proposals that merit substantial discussions and an early elimination of the low-ranked proposals.
2. By gathering elements of the feedback to applicants. Particularly for the low ranked proposals, the comments obtained by their individual reviewing may sufficiently capture substantial reasons for the rejection.

### Ranking methodology

Starting from the preliminary ranking, panels may decide to go through a process of successive elimination stages, where the depth of discussion increases as the number



of proposals in contention decreases. Panels will provide an appropriate panel comment for each unsuccessful proposal at Step 1 and for all proposals at Step 2 (see feedback to applicants section).

### **The possible use of a voting system**

In the later stages of the evaluation process, panels may expedite their ranking process by the use of a voting system. In such a system, each Panel Member distributes a number of votes to his / her preferred proposals. Proposals would be ranked based on the votes received. A Panel Member cannot vote for a proposal if under a Col, and in such case, an appropriate adjustment is applied. The voting shall avoid tactical behaviour; however, after voting is complete, individual votes are transparent to the panel. The results of such a vote need not be binding. The voting is to be considered mainly as an effective way to create a ranking based on a set of individual preferences.

### **Outputs of the panel meetings**

The output of any individual panel meeting, to be provided at the end of the meeting, consists of the following elements:

1. The ranked list of proposals, depending on the evaluation step;
2. The feedback to applicants (see section 11 below);
3. A panel report.

### **The panel report**

In addition to the ranked list of proposals, the panel report (prepared by the Panel Chair) briefly documents the evaluation methodology followed by the panel. It may also contain, as deemed appropriate, reflections on issues such as the quality of proposals in relation to the budget and observations on cross panel/cross domain proposals. It may contain recommendations to be taken into account by the ERC in future review sessions.

## **10. The tasks of the panel meetings**

**In step 1 of the evaluation process part B section 1 of the proposal is assessed, marked and ranked.**

In cases where panels determine that a proposal is of a cross-panel or cross-domain nature, panels may request additional reviews by appropriate members of other panel(s).

At the end of step 1, the proposals will be ranked by the panels on the basis of the marks they have received and the panels' overall appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses. Then, the panel makes three types of recommendations:

1. Proposals that should go forward to the second step, scored **A**. The number of proposals selected for step 2 may correspond to up to 3.0 times the panel's indicative budget.



2. Proposals of high quality but not sufficient to pass to Step 2 of the evaluation, scored **B**. These proposals are not further evaluated and will not be recommended for funding.

3. Proposals that are not of sufficient quality to pass to Step 2 of the evaluation, scored **C**. In this case applicants may also be subject to resubmission limitations in future calls if specified in the relevant Work Programme of those calls.

**In step 2 of the evaluation all sections of the retained proposals (i.e. Part B section 1 and 2) are assessed and ranked by the panel.**

In cases where panels determine that a proposal is of a cross-panel or cross-domain nature, panels may request additional reviews by appropriate members of other panel(s) or additional remote Referees.

For the Starting Grant Call, Principal Investigators whose proposals have been retained for the second step of the evaluation may be invited for an interview to present their project to the evaluation panel meeting in Brussels.

At the end of step 2 the panel produces a final ranking list.

At this point the panel identifies:

- those proposals which fully meet the ERC's excellence criterion and are therefore recommended for funding if sufficient funds are available, scored **A**;
- those proposals which meet some but not all elements of the ERC's excellence criterion and therefore will not be funded, scored **B**

Proposals recommended for funding will be funded by the ERC if sufficient funds are available. Proposals will be funded in priority order from the respective panel budgets based on their rank. If any funds are still available from the panel budgets or additional funds become available, proposals will then be funded in order of their "normalised accumulated budget"<sup>6</sup>.

At the end of each step, in the feedback to applicant it will be indicated the ranking range of the proposal out of the proposals evaluated by the panel.

## 11. Feedback to applicants (the Evaluation Report)

Apart from recommendations on "fundability" of proposals and their ranking, the most important output of the panel meetings is the feedback to applicants. According to the "Rules", the ERCEA will provide an Evaluation Report to each applicant, which documents the results of the evaluation. Especially in the case of rejection, the Evaluation Report needs to convey a comprehensive explanation of the fate of the

<sup>6</sup> Additional funds can become available from eventualities such as the failure of the granting procedure to projects, the withdrawal of proposals, budget savings agreed during the granting procedure, or the availability of additional budget from other sources. The recommended normalised accumulated budget (NAB) for every panel is calculated by summing the normalised budget (recommended budget divided by panel's indicative budget) of each proposal from the top position down to the actual position of the given proposal. Thus, the normalised accumulated budget takes into account the position of the proposal in its panel ranking, the recommended budget of the proposal and of all proposals ranked higher in the same panel and the indicative budget of the panel.



proposal and the position of the Panel with regard to it. The principle applied is that the Evaluation Report of each proposal contains a documentation of all comments and observations it received from both panel members and remote Referees.

### **Elements of the Evaluation Report**

The Evaluation Report of any proposal comprises three components:

1. The decision of the panel (A, B or C grade plus ranking range).
2. A comment by the panel, usually written by the "lead reviewer" and approved by the panel.
3. The comments from the individual reviews given by remote Referees and Panel Members prior to the panel meeting.

### **The comments by individual reviewers**

The comments by remote reviewers (Panel Members and remote Referees) are included in the Evaluation Report in principle as received. They may be subject to mild editing by the ERCEA, without altering their intended message, in order to enhance clarity, remove any inappropriate, irrelevant or polemic remarks, remove revelation of the remote Referee's identity, misleading recommendations, etc. These individual comments may not necessarily be convergent – differences of opinion about the merits of a proposal are legitimate among evaluators, and it is potentially useful for an applicant to be informed of the various views.

### **The panel comment**

In many cases the comments by the individual reviewers provide a sufficient explanation of the fate of the proposal. In such cases, typically the panel comment simply acknowledges the weaknesses or strengths pointed out by the individual reviewers. It does not contain observations that substantially deviate from the view expressed by the individual reviewers.

In other cases, the panel may take a position that is different from what could be inferred from the comments of the individual reviewers. For example, if the panel discussion reveals an important weakness in a proposal the panel comment shall document its reasons in a substantial comment.

In the first step, a number of proposals of reasonable / good quality but ranking below the budgetary cut-off level will be rejected. Such proposals may typically have positive comments from individual reviewers. However they do not gather enough support from Panel Members when taking into account the budgetary constraint. In such cases, the panel comments may be expressed in these terms.

The panel comment is the key element of the information provided to the applicants at the end of the evaluation. It should clearly explain the decision adopted by the panel substantiating the reason which led to the panel decision.



## **12. The role of the Scientific Council**

The ERC ScC may delegate its members to attend panel meetings. The role of the ScC delegates relates to ensure and promote coherence of reviews between panels, to identify best practices, and to gather information for future reviews of the procedures by the ScC.

In conformity with the mandate of the ScC, to carry out the scientific governance of the ERC, and in line with the role of the ScC foreseen in the WP, ScC Members will abstain from influencing the results of the review process.

## **13. The role of Independent Observers**

Under the Rules, the ERCEA has an obligation to invite Independent Observers to monitor at regular intervals its reviewing sessions. The Independent Observers are independent of the ERCEA and of the ScC. Their function and role is described in the "Rules".