

Call for proposals financed under the Italian Science Fund - 2021

Evaluation guidelines 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Ministry for Universities and Research (MUR) supports public research assessed by peer review based on scientific quality and merit.

1.2 The Italian Science fund (FIS) finances research projects to promote the national research system, strengthen interactions between universities and research institutions, and foster Italian participation in initiatives related to the European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. To this end, the FIS finances fundamental research projects conducted by early-career researchers (Starting Grants) and established researchers (Advanced Grants), for a period of up to five years.

1.3 The 2021 FIS call is a € 50 million funding scheme, with € 20 million allocated to projects proposals from early career researchers (Starting Grants) and € 30 million to projects proposals from established researchers (Advanced Grants).

1.4 Project proposals may be submitted in the following three research domains, as identified by the European Research Council (ERC)

- Life Sciences (LS);
- Physical/Chemical Sciences and Engineering (PE);
- Social Sciences and Humanities (SH).

1.5 Projects shall be evaluated, as set out in the 2021 FIS Call for Proposals (hereinafter also referred to as "Call"). The National Committee for Research Evaluation (CNVR) may recruit external experts at any time during the evaluation process: the selected experts will be included in a MUR directory , after their acceptance of the assignment.

1.6 External experts may not have any role or participation - in the projects submitted for the call. Accordingly, members of the CNVR shall abstain from assigning external experts to project proposals submitted by a Principal Investigator (PI) linked to the same University or research institution where the CNVR member serves or has served in the last five years.

- CNVR members and external experts shall not act as reviewers for projects submitted by a PI with whom they have had research collaborations, in the five years prior to the publication of the call.

- Upon acceptance of the assignment, each external expert shall sign a statement as to the absence of conflicts of interest and compliance with the principles of ethics and confidentiality (pursuant to Articles 46 and 47 of D.P.R. 28 December 2000, no. 445).

- The Directorate General for Research Coordination and Enhancement, through the office of the sole responsible of the procedure, provides secretarial functions for the CNVR.

2. EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

The CNVR is guided by the evaluation and deontological principles applied by the European Research Council.

The evaluation of proposals is carried out according to the phases set out in the Call.

2.1 Step 1

Step 1 of the evaluation process is conducted by the CNVR. Proposals are assigned to CNVR members according to the ERC macro sector they belong to (LS, PE, SH). Where necessary, the CNVR may be assisted by external reviewers, recruited among highly qualified experts. The CNVR may select experts through databases, such as Clarivate and Scopus, and/or EU lists of experts, where available.

2.1.1 The CNVR, where necessary, may assign a reasonable number of project proposals with similar themes to the same external reviewers following the priority criterion of competence.

In Step 1, part B of the project proposal is assessed based on to the items listed in the table below.

Project Summary <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quality of proposal: objectives, method- Quality of proposal: expected results (“high risk/high gain”)	Max 10
PI Curriculum vitae <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Scientific independence (for Starting Grant) or leadership in research (for Advanced Grant)- Main results obtained by the candidate	Max 10
Maximum total score	20

The sum of points assigned for each item is the total score assigned to the proposal in the first step of the evaluation process. Proposals that do not reach a total score of at least 18/20 are not admitted to the subsequent evaluation phase.

2.2 Step 2

The second evaluation step assesses the project proposal as a whole (part C). The CNVR recruits three highly qualified anonymous and independent external reviewers, which may be selected using databases such as Clarivate and Scopus and/or EU databases of experts. External reviewers for the second step shall be different from those recruited for the first step and will be included in the before mentioned MUR directory after acceptance of their assignment and having declared absence of conflicts of interest. CNVR will select a suitable number of additional external reviewers who may act as substitutes or as a fourth evaluator, so as to guarantee an adequate number of reviewers in order to respect the evaluation timeframe.

2.2.1 Evaluation procedure

Using the dedicated IT Platform for the call, each external reviewer - independently and without any interaction with the other experts assigned to the same project, and as such shall remain anonymous - completes the evaluation for project, highlighting strengths and weaknesses and assigning a numerical score for each criterion (the two forms are included in the Appendix).

The final score awarded by the CNVR is made up of the arithmetic average of the overall scores assigned to the project by each independent reviewer.

The CNVR proceeds to compare the scores assigned by each of the three reviewers; if the highest and lowest of the three scores differ by a number lower than or equal to 5, the project evaluation phase is considered completed.

If the highest and lowest of the three scores differ by more than 5 points, but the highest score is still below the threshold score (22/25), the evaluation phase of the project is considered completed; the arithmetic average of the three scores constitutes the final score awarded to the project.

If the highest and lowest of the three scores differ by more than 5 points and the highest score is higher than the threshold score, the CNVR acquires a fourth evaluation from an additional reviewer; in this case, the mean is calculated by adding together the three closest scores and this value constitutes the final score obtained by the project. If, following the evaluation of the fourth reviewer, a similar difference is found between the two resulting scoring threesomes on which the arithmetic average is calculated, the final score takes into account the threesome with the higher average .

2.2.2 Interview

The IP whose project exceeds the minimum threshold of 22/25 in the second step will be invited to an interview conducted in English by the CNVR and, if considered necessary, with the support of independent experts, excluding those who participated in the second stage of the evaluation. Before conducting the interviews, the CNVR acquires the documentation related to the second step of the evaluation from the independent reviewers.

The interview, lasting no longer than 30 minutes, consists in a presentation of the project of maximum 10 minutes (slides may be used) followed by a panel discussion. The interview is scored between 1 and 10.

2.2.3 Awarding of final marks and rankings

The final score for each project is calculated by adding up the following:

- 1) scores awarded in the first evaluation step;
- 2) arithmetic average score awarded by reviewers in the second evaluation step;
- 3) scores awarded by the CNVR for the interview.

In compliance with the final scores assigned to the proposals, the CNVR prepares the ranking list of projects for each macro-sector. Based on an analysis of the economic proposal requests, the CNVR establishes the congruent costs and related funding. If the overall costs of the projects are considered to be not compatible/appropriate, they may be reduced up to 20%. Personnel costs linked to employment contracts constraints constitute an exception.

2.2.4

Equal score

In the event of insufficient resources to ensure funding for all projects ranked with an equal score, the CNVR will use the scores assigned to the interview to adjust the ranking. In case of a persistent equal ranking s, funding will be awarded to the youngest PI.

APPENDIX

Italian Science Fund (FIS) 2021
EVALUATION TABLE FOR REVIEWERS

SECOND STEP

<p>Scientific proposal</p> <p>1) Extent of the proposal's potential to innovate beyond the state of the art; degree of interdisciplinarity, where relevant.</p> <p>2) Appropriateness of methodology, relevance of objectives and possible ethical aspects.</p>	<p>1-10</p> <p>1-5</p>
<p>Human resources and time commitment</p> <p>3) Appropriateness of research team and proposed time commitments</p>	<p>1-5</p>
<p>Planning, resources and economic plan</p> <p>4) Economic/financial plan, adequacy of requested resources;</p> <p>Appropriateness of management planning of project activities;</p> <p>Appropriateness of Host Institution resources.</p>	<p>1-5</p>
<p>Maximum total score</p>	<p>25</p>

REVIEWERS COMMENTS ON SCORES AWARDED

According to the table above, reviewers are asked to motivate the scores awarded by answering the following questions.

SCIENTIFIC PROPOSALS (max 1000 characters)

1. To what extent does the proposed research address major challenges?

To what extent are its objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art, e.g. new concepts and perspectives or interdisciplinary development?

To what extent can the proposed research be considered "high risk/high gain"?

2. To what extent is the proposed scientific methodology feasible?

To what extent is the proposed research methodology appropriate for achieving the objectives of the project?

Does the proposal develop an innovative methodology?

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR PROFILE (max 1000 characters)

3. To what extent has the PI demonstrated the ability to propose and conduct pioneering research?

To what extent does the PI have the required expertise and capacity to lead and execute the project?

To what extent has the PI demonstrated creativity and independence (Starting grant)?

To what extent has the PI shown leadership in training and the ability to promote and enhance the professional growth of young researchers (Advanced grant)?

Is the PI highly committed to the project and has he/she demonstrated a willingness to devote a significant amount of time to the project?

RESOURCES (max 1000 characters)

4. Is the financial request adequate and appropriate to the needs of the project? Is the host organisation appropriate to ensure that the project is adequately conducted?

