European Science Foundation (ESF)

Principles for Research Assessment followed by the ESF Reviewers

This document is intended for the Reviewers* who take part
in research assessment and grant evaluation processes
carried out by ESF, to highlight our principles and quality standards.

* In this context, Reviewers are defined as international experts invited to provide
a remote review of a research proposal closely related to their field of expertise.

ESF Role in Research Assessment & Grant Evaluation

The **European Science Foundation (ESF) is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organisation** that has been implementing scientific and research related processes since 1974.

ESF carries out qualitative assessment of a wide range of research projects and applications to support organisations in identifying and funding the best research. Our partners include research funding organisations, philanthropies, universities, EU-funded projects and programmes. The type of applications assessed range from research or R&D project proposals to (post-)doctoral fellowships and researchers' academic profiles.

ESF College of Experts unites 10,500+ researchers across various scientific disciplines in 90+ countries. Their expertise and participation are instrumental for the quality of the grant evaluation processes.

ESF is committed in ensuring high-quality peer review processes by developing and setting up fairer assessment approaches in line with the reform on research assessment promoted by the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) for which ESF hosts and operates the secretariat since December 2022.

In providing expert reviews of research proposals, ESF's efforts and the work of its reviewers are guided by the following values and principles which build on:

- *European Peer Review Guide* (ESF, 2011)
- *Statement of principles of peer/merit review* (Global Research Council, 2018)
- *Recommendations on Research Assessment Processes* (Science Europe, 2020)
- *Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment* (CoARA, 2022)

1 **Expert assessment:** Reviewers should have sound expertise in the relevant topic to provide a high-quality review of the research proposal and its potential contribution to the relevant discipline and beyond.

2 **Trust:** The evaluation process is built on trust between all stakeholders (applicants, funders, ESF and its reviewers) and should demonstrate a high-level of integrity. Reviewers are trusted to handle research proposals under evaluation in confidence and not to take undue or calculated advantage of knowledge they may have obtained from those proposals.

3 **Impartiality:** Reviewers are trusted to exercise their judgment independent from any interests and obligations that might interfere with the exercise of that judgment. Reviewers should read and respect ESF's Conflict of Interest (CoI) rules and procedures as to how to disclose and manage real, potential or perceived Conflicts of Interest, as well as ESF's guidelines in relation to implicit bias.

4 **Transparency:** Applications must be assessed on similar grounds within the same funding programme, and ESF ensures that all reviewers are provided with clear and concise guidance on the objectives and evaluation criteria. A full and fair review requires that its outcome can be justified by evidence of thorough assessment with respect to the evaluation criteria. It is important that feedback provided to the applicants is similarly structured around the programme's evaluation criteria.

5 **Responsible research evaluation:** Evaluation of research quality needs to be based on standards of quality within the relevant discipline and definition of excellence of the specific funding programme. When assessing applicants' achievements, reviewers should consider a variety of relevant research outputs and activities. If any metrics are provided in the application, these should be used with care: no single indicator can fully reflect the quality of an applicant or their research and should not be used as the only or main basis of judgement[i].

6 **Respect:** Reviewers are expected to present their views in a measured, factual and neutral manner, with respect for the applicant, their discipline and ideas and offer polite and constructive feedback. It is perfectly acceptable, and indeed, expected, that a review provides an honest assessment of the proposal, and any serious concerns should be voiced. However, how those concerns are voiced does matter – especially for early-career researchers.

7 **Timeliness:** Efficiency and speed are among the pillars of good practice in peer review. As peer review reports often serve as support for other steps in the evaluation process, it is of utmost importance that reviewers respect the deadlines they commit to when accepting the invitation from ESF.

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[i] See the *Bibliometrics: Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics* (Hicks et al., 2015) and the *San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment* (DORA, 2012).