

Key Digital Technologies Joint Undertaking

Evaluation and selection procedures related to Calls for proposals

This document describes the steps that shall be followed by the KDT JU related to the Calls for proposals, the procedures for evaluation and selection of proposals, the allocation of public funding following such Calls and the subsequent establishment of grant agreements for projects¹.

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¹ "Project" is a research and/or innovation action or coordination and support actions selected by the KDT JU following competitive calls for proposals

I Preliminary Steps

1. The Private Members Board shall submit to the Executive Director the SRIA (Strategic Research and Innovatio Agenda) in due time, to be included in the draft work programme.
2. The public authorities (participating states and the European Commission) shall communicate the following information to the Executive Director in due time to be included in the draft work programme and taking into account the SRIA:
 - a. The estimates of expenditure for the next year(s) covered by the work programme;
 - b. The reimbursement rate of the eligible costs to be used to determine the financial contribution of the public authority (if relevant, by category of participant and/or by type of action);

Only for KDT participating states:

- c. When they differ from the conditions laid down in Horizon Europe Regulation², the specific criteria regarding the eligibility of individual applicants to receive funding from the participating states – such criteria should lend themselves to verification;
 - d. When the participating state does not entrust the KDT JU with the implementation of its contribution to its participants, any specific rules regarding the eligibility of costs.
3. Upon the completion of procedure set in Article 14(1) and in accordance with the requirements set out in Article 31(4) of KDT JU Financial rules³ the Executive Director shall prepare and submit for adoption to the Governing Board by the end of the year prior to its implementation the draft work programme including the scope of the calls for proposals needed to implement the research and innovation activities plan as proposed by the Private Members Board and the corresponding expenditure estimates as proposed by the public authorities.
4. The work programme shall also determine the number of calls for proposals to be launched by the KDT JU in the referenced year(s).

II Launching the Calls for proposals

1. The Public Authorities Board (PAB) shall approve the launch of calls for proposals, in accordance with the work programme. The following standard types of grants are implementable by KDT JU:
 - research and innovation actions (RIA),
 - innovation actions (IA),
 - coordination and support actions (CSA – standard and lump sum),
 - Pre-Commercial Procurement (PCP)/Public Procurement of Innovative Solutions (PPI),
 - if provided in the Work programme: Identified beneficiary actions (e.g. coordination and support actions (CSA) or programme co-fund actions) can exceptionally be funded without an open call for proposals as identified beneficiary actions as well as ‘Framework partnerships and specific grants’ i.e. actions (e.g. RIA, IA or CSA

² Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination

³ KDT GB 2021.02, Annex 30 KDT

actions) that can be organised as a long-term framework partnerships (FPAs) with specific grants for specific actions (SGAs).

2. Before publishing the calls for proposals, the Executive Director shall receive from each public authority the confirmation or an update of the estimated expenditure for the calls.
3. The PAB shall instruct the Executive Director to publish the call(s). Each call shall specify the following:
 - Scope, objective(s) and outcomes as per the work programme;
 - Rules for participation, including any specific national criteria and/or rules as per the work programme;
 - Estimated expenditures from each public authority;
 - The reimbursement rates as per work programme;
 - Whether one/two-stage submission schemes will apply as per work programme and deadlines for submission of proposals at each stage;
 - The eligibility, selection and evaluation (award) criteria, the score ranges (half marks or scores with a resolution of one decimal), the corresponding thresholds and weights, and any overall threshold that a proposal should reach in order to be retained;
 - The planned date by which all applicants shall be informed of the outcome of the evaluation of their application and the indicative date for the signature of grant agreements;
 - Any other conditions for the establishment of the grant agreements.
4. The calls for proposals shall be published on the website of the KDT JU as well as on the EU Funding and Tenders portal/Single Electronic Data Interchange Area (SEDIA) for Horizon Europe.
5. The KDT JU shall make use of the toolset made available by the European Commission to handle the submission, evaluation and grant management fully electronically with the participants.
6. The Executive Director must assign KDT staff to act as:
 - Call coordinator to plan and organise the proposal submission and evaluation process and to act as contact point for practical questions
 - Programme officers that will manage part of the submission and evaluation procedure
 - Programme manager who will give directions on how to deal with any sensitive issue that may arise
 - Moderators who will help the consensus groups come to a conclusion
 - Panel chairs for the panel review
 - Quality controllers

The Executive Director should set up the evaluation committee for the call. The Executive Director must appoint:

- Outside experts as evaluators,
- Qualified staff members and outside experts to perform the ethics screening.

III Evaluation and Selection process and allocation of public funding

III.1 General rules

1. The Governing Board may appoint independent observer(s) to:
 - a. observe the practical workings of the evaluation process with full access to documents,
 - b. give independent advice on:
 - i. the conduct and fairness of the evaluation, particularly whether the evaluation process is carried out with respecting the principles stated in III.1(3)
 - ii. the application of the evaluation criteria
 - iii. ways in which the procedures could be improvedbut not to express views on the proposals or the opinions of the experts⁴.

The independent observer(s) shall report to the KDT JU Governing Board on any aspect of the evaluation as required, in particular on the respect of the evaluation rules and procedures.

2. The evaluation process carried out with the assistance of independent experts shall respect the principles of excellence, transparency, fairness & impartiality, efficiency & speed, ethics & security and confidentiality.
3. The work programme may provide that prior to submitting a Full Project Proposal (FPP), applicants shall submit a Project Outline (PO) to the KDT JU (two-stage submission scheme). In this case the Call for proposals shall state the deadlines for the submission of POs and FPPs and provide templates for the PO and FPP. When a PO phase is foreseen, it shall be eliminatory, i.e. only applicants of successfully evaluated POs shall be invited to submit a FPP.
4. If the two-stage evaluation process is provided for in the work programme, the following shall apply:
 - a. At the PO stage of the evaluation process, a minimum of two experts will evaluate each proposal during individual evaluation. There will be no panel review,
 - b. Applicants will be informed of the results of the PO stage of the evaluation process and if successful, invited to submit the FPP,
 - c. ESR⁴s (see section III.4.D(4)) shall not be sent before the completion of the FPP stage, unless decided otherwise by the Public Authorities Board for the PO phase;
 - d. The FPP must be consistent with the PO proposal and may not differ substantially.
5. For each Call and before the deadline of submission of PO (if applicable) or FPP, the KDT JU shall establish a pool of experts who may participate in the evaluation of proposals. These experts must be registered in the lists of experts at the disposal of the KDT JU (the Horizon Europe experts database).
6. The KDT JU may call upon the advice of the Private Members Board and the PAB for the identification of independent experts.
7. All experts involved in the evaluation of POs or FPPs shall sign a declaration of confidentiality and absence of conflict of interest. Experts that have a conflict of interests shall be excluded by the KDT JU from the concerned activity.
8. The PAB may invite coordinators to provide further clarification on their proposal.

⁴ Evaluation summary report.

9. Any public authority may appoint one of its representatives to act as observer in the evaluation process.
10. The Call Coordinators and Programme Officers must check the admissibility and eligibility of the proposals and partners. The Executive Director (as RAO) validates proposal or partner rejection decisions for inadmissible or ineligible proposals or partners.

III.2. Evaluation process

1. The evaluation process shall be organised in three main phases:

Phase 1 – Individual evaluation

Phase 2 - Consensus group

Phase 3 – Sub-panel and/or Panel review

Any of these phases can be done remotely. When a two-stage submission scheme is provided for in the work programme, the PO stage shall not include the panel review. The FPP stage shall include all three phases.

2. The following shall apply for the assignment of experts to a proposal at any stage:
 - Rules for conflict of interest (as defined in Model Contracts for Experts , “Code of conduct for evaluators”: see Appendix 1),
 - A balance of profiles (private/public), expertise, gender and nationalities at proposal and panel level,
 - A regular renewal of experts,
 - The possibility for applicants to send with the FPP a list of companies or experts that should not be assigned to the evaluation of the proposal.
3. The KDT JU Executive Director shall implement the above rules as well as any other rule indicated in this document for the assignment of experts without compromising the quality of the evaluation. The Executive Director shall justify any exceptions to these rules to the Governing Board.
4. Public funding to participants shall comply with the applicable state aid rules.

III.3 Project Outline (PO) stage evaluation

A. Admissibility & Eligibility check

1. To be considered admissible, a proposal shall be as set out in the Work programme:
 - Submitted by the coordinator in the Electronic Submission System before the call deadline,
 - be readable, accessible and printable.
 - fulfil any other admissibility conditions foreseen in the respective annual work programme

Proposals without a draft plan for the exploitation and dissemination of the results (if required by the work programme) or incomplete proposals (that is not containing all the requested

administrative data, proposal description, etc. and any supporting document specified in the call) may be inadmissible if essential elements are missing.

In case of an ‘obvious clerical error’ (e.g. omission to submit evidence or information on a non-substantial element of the proposal), the Executive Director may ask the applicant to provide the missing information or supporting documents. However, if the missing information or document would substantially change the proposal, it shall not be taken into account.

2. To be considered eligible, the proposal and/or partner shall correspond to the standard and specific eligibility criteria and conditions as set in the work programme and in Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination.
3. The Executive Director shall validate the proposal or partner rejection decisions for inadmissible or ineligible proposals or partners. The Executive Director shall inform the applicants accordingly as part of step III.3D.(2).
4. Eligible POs shall be made available to the experts, to appointed observers, and to the public authorities potentially involved in the funding of the proposal.

B. Individual evaluation

1. The Call Coordinator with the Programme Officers must assign the experts to the proposals that must be evaluated.
2. Upon admissibility and eligibility check, the POs shall be made available to the experts in electronic form for remote evaluation. Each expert shall give scores and accompanying comments to the evaluation criteria as set below.
3. The PO shall be evaluated according to one or more of the following Horizon Europe criteria: (1) Excellence, (2) Impact, (3) Quality and efficiency of the implementation.

For each criterion, proposals will be given scores of 0 to 5, as follows:

0 — The project fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information

1 — Poor: the criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses

2 — Fair: the project broadly addresses the criterion but there are significant weaknesses

3 — Good: the project addresses the criterion well but a number of shortcomings are present

4 — Very good: the project addresses the criterion very well but a small number of shortcomings are present

5 — Excellent: the project successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion; any shortcomings are minor.

The maximum overall score is therefore fifteen (15). If the work programme provides for a weighting factor, this will be used to determine the final ranking.

4. Each expert must examine each proposal individually to evaluate and give a view on the additional questions (scope, operational capacity, exceptional funding for third country participants/international organisations) and submit his/her individual evaluation report.

C. Consensus group

1. The consensus group consists of the experts who carried out the individual evaluations for a given proposal. The group is assisted by a moderator and a consensus group rapporteur.
2. Upon individual evaluation, the individual experts form a ‘consensus group’ to come to a common view and agree on comments and scores (in a ‘consensus report’). If foreseen in the work programme, the consensus report may consist in a collation of the individual evaluation reports or extracts from them.
3. The consensus discussions shall be moderated by the KDT JU operational services managing the call. The experts shall synthesise and consolidate the individual scores, and remarks for each project outline.

D. Results of the PO stage

1. The Executive Director shall present to the PAB the results of the evaluation of the PO proposals. Participating states may provide comments on the potential eligibility of their applicants against any predetermined national criteria as published with the call.
2. The Executive Director shall inform the applicants in writing at the latest 6 weeks before the deadline for submitting FPPs of the decision on their application following the PO stage procedure. If the applicant is not successful, the reasons for the rejection of the application will be provided, with reference in particular to the selection and award criteria. This information shall not constitute a commitment for funding, neither for the KDT JU nor for any of participating states towards the applicant.

III.4. Full Project Proposal (FPP) stage evaluation⁵

A. Admissibility & Eligibility check

1. The Call Coordinators and Programme Officers must check the admissibility and eligibility of the proposals and partners to verify if the eligibility conditions are still complied with. The

⁵ The procedure described for FPP applies *mutatis mutandis* if the work programme prescribes a one-step submission scheme, i.e. in case of no preceding PO phase.

Executive Director (as RAO) validates proposal or partner rejection decisions for inadmissible or ineligible proposals or partners.

2. The Executive Director shall inform the applicants accordingly as part of step. III.9(8).
3. Eligible FPPs shall be made available to the experts, to appointed observers, and to the public authorities potentially involved in the funding of the proposal. Public authorities shall also receive a summary of those FPPs with which they are not financially concerned.
4. FPPs shall be evaluated and scored as described in section III.3.B(3).

B. Individual evaluation

1. The Call Coordinator shall assign at least 4 experts to evaluate each FPP.
2. The FPPs shall be made available to the experts in electronic form for remote evaluation. Each expert shall give scores and accompanying comments to the three evaluation criteria. Their individual evaluation reports shall be communicated to the KDTJU operational services managing the call within the defined timeframe.

C. Consensus group

1. Upon individual evaluation, the individual experts form a ‘consensus group’ to come to a common view and agree on comments and scores (in a ‘consensus report’). If foreseen in the work programme, the consensus report may consist in a collation of the individual evaluation reports or extracts from them.
2. The consensus group shall be moderated by the KDT JU operational services managing the call. The experts shall synthesise and consolidate the individual scores, and remarks for each proposal.
3. These consensus group shall assess the operational capacity of the applicants necessary for the success of the project if executed. Proposals shall be evaluated on their own merit and not their potential, should certain changes be made.

D. Sub-Panel group

See Appendix 2 “Rules of procedure for Sub-Panels and Panels”.

E. Panel review

1. The Executive Director (as RAO) must set up a panel and appoint Panel chairs and Panel rapporteurs (see Appendix 2 “Rules of procedure for Sub-Panels and Panels”).
1. In this session, the consensus reports shall be examined, the consistency of the comments and the scores shall be checked and any cases where there are dissenting views shall be resolved and recorded in the panel report. The panel session shall resolve eventual score ties according to predefined criteria. Where necessary, the panel shall propose a new set of scores or a revision of the comments.
2. The ‘panel report’ shall include the Consensus Report or ESR of each proposal (if available) (based on the consensus report, including comments and scores, and taking into account the

panel's deliberations and any new scores or comments considered necessary), with explanations and a list of proposals passing all thresholds, along with a final score, ('panel ranked list') and, where necessary, the panel's recommendations for a priority order for proposals in the event of equal scores, using the procedure set out in the work programme.

3. The applicants shall receive a copy of their respective ESR when they are informed of the final outcome of their proposal following the PAB decision on allocation of funding in accordance with section III.9(8).
4. The panel session shall result in two lists of proposals: "above threshold" and "below threshold". Proposals with a score below threshold in any criterion or in the total score shall be included in the "below threshold" list. The "above threshold" list is ordered according to the total score of the proposals (following the procedure to resolve the score ties).
5. The Executive Director shall submit to the PAB the "above threshold" list of proposals with the evaluation results.
6. The Executive Director submits to the Commission the list of above threshold proposals for a double funding check⁶.

III.5. Ethics review (ethics screening and ethics assessment)

1. The ethics audits and checks on recipients must normally be carried out by the KDT JU, but the Commission may decide to carry out the ethics audits itself or together with KDT JU, and the ethics checks together with KDT JU.

The Commission will carry out ethics audits and checks on the KDT JU itself in order to verify the quality of the ethics appraisal system in place.

2. The KDT JU carries out the ethics pre-screening, the ethics screening and the ethics assessment of proposals. These procedures shall be equivalent to those of the Commission. The KDT JU will check, with the help of independent ethics experts, whether the proposal complies with ethical principles and relevant legislation.

The ethics review begins in parallel with the evaluation or soon after.

The experts must fill out for each proposal, an ethics pre-screening form.

3. All proposals retained for funding shall go through an ethics review process (made up of one or two consecutive steps, depending on whether or not ethics issues are confirmed, whether they are adequately addressed in view of their severity and complexity). The ethics review may lead to 'ethics requirements' to be incorporated in Annex 1 'Description of Action'⁷ to

⁶ 'Double funding' means information on whether the project is already funded/proposed for funding under Horizon Europe or another EU funding programme.

⁷ The "Description of action" is a technical document which presents, in as clear and concise a manner as possible, all activities, actions and tasks which the Project participants are committed to undertake in order to fulfil the scientific and research objectives stipulated in the grant agreements. It is based upon the description of scientific/technological objectives and work programme outlined in the Project proposal and possibly modified according to specific recommendations made by the experts during evaluation and as further discussed during grant preparation. In addition to its legal significance, the 'description of action' is meant to serve as benchmark for the grant beneficiaries, the Joint Undertaking, the national funding authorities and possibly experts to effectively monitor and check the progress during the Project's lifetime

the grant agreement. The grant agreement shall only be signed after the ethics screening/assessment has been carried out, and provided all conditions are met.

4. The ethics review is part of the Commission's overall 'Horizon Europe ethics appraisal scheme'⁸ which includes all of the following:
 - ethics self-assessment (by the applicants, in their proposal),
 - ethics review (by the KDT JU, during the selection procedure),
 - if necessary, ethics checks, reviews and audits (during the implementation of the action and up to two years afterwards).
5. The Commission shall be informed of the result of ethics checks and audits concerning human embryonic (hESC) or significant research integrity issues requiring an in depth assessment by ethics experts. In this case, the Commission may undertake an in-depth examination of the case if necessary with the help of an external expert panel and address binding recommendations to the KDT JU.
6. The KDT JU uses external ethics experts to ensure that ethics issues identified in proposals are adequately addressed (both for the ethics review and other procedures of the ethics appraisal scheme).
7. The list of ethics experts is drawn up annually by the Commission's DG RTD Ethics Department.
8. Proposals shall be evaluated to examine if they raise 'ethics issues' and, if so, to check if these issues are adequately addressed (including during the action implementation phase)⁹.
9. The ethics review has 2 stages, stage 1 (ethics screening) and stage 2 (ethics assessment). All proposals shall undergo an ethics review process, made up of one or two consecutive stages, depending on whether or not the ethics issues are confirmed, their severity and complexity.
10. Stage 1 — Ethics screening

The call coordinator is responsible for the ethics screening. He/she must assign ethics experts/qualified staff to the proposals that must be screened. During the ethics screening, the proposals that have an empty 'ethics issue table' in the Part A (and therefore no ethics self-assessment in Part B) are first 'pre-screened', in order to establish potential ethical issues.

Each expert/qualified staff must first examine each proposal individually and draft and submit his/her ethics screening individual report.

The group of ethics experts/qualified staff must then look at each proposal together and come to a common view. The rapporteur prepares — for each proposal — an ethics screening consensus report.

Proposals potentially raising ethics issues are then screened more thoroughly ('full screening'), in order to check if the ethics issues are properly addressed by the applicants. As a result, the proposal can either be cleared, conditionally cleared or go through the ethics assessment.
11. Stage 2 — Ethics assessment (if necessary)

⁸ The global approach on ethics issues is developed under the responsibility of the Commission's DG RTD Ethics department.

⁹ The main focus of the ethics review is on the **ethical dimension** (e.g. human rights and protection of human beings, animal protection and welfare, data protection and privacy, environmental protection, misuse of research results, dual use), however, **research integrity aspects** may also be addressed (e.g., fabrication, falsification and plagiarism, in proposing, performing, or reviewing research or in reporting research results; including misrepresentation of credentials and improprieties of authorship).

If the ethics screening shows more serious or complex ethics issues requiring a more in-depth analysis, they will be subject to the ethics assessment and DG RTD Ethics department should be informed. For proposal involving human embryonic stems cells (hESC), KDT JU shall request the Commission's DG RTD Ethics Department to perform the ethics assessment.

12. The KDT JU may contact applicants during the ethics review if more information or supporting documents are needed.
13. For proposals with NO ethics clearance, the call coordinator must prepare a proposal rejection letter and a proposal rejection decision. The Executive Director validates them. Ethics requirements that must be fulfilled during grant implementation, are automatically included as ethics deliverables in Annex 1 to the grant agreement. Other ethics requirements must be implemented before grant agreement signature.

III.6. Security scrutiny

1. A proposal should not contain any information that is 'EU classified' under the rules on security of information in the Commission internal Rules of Procedure¹⁰. Proposals concerning actions that would deal with information that is 'EU-classified' under the Commission Internal Rules of Procedure shall undergo a periodic 'security scrutiny'¹¹.
2. The scrutiny check shall be limited to identifying actions that involve security-sensitive information (and classifying them and their deliverables as 'classified deliverables') and shall not constitute a fully-fledged security check on all potentially security-relevant aspects of an action.
3. Security scrutiny may apply to proposals submitted to KDT JU, for instance, if:
 - the applicants declared in the proposal submission form that it is 'security-sensitive', i.e. concerns EU-classified information;
 - the topic is flagged in the work programme as potentially resulting in security-sensitive actions;
 - the KDT JU detects or suspects that:
 - a. classified information is, or may be, used as background and/or
 - b. it is planned that some results will be classified.

In such cases, the process will be triggered by the KDT JU operational services managing the call and passed to the chair of the 'Security Scrutiny Committee' in the Commission.¹²

¹⁰ Commission Decision 2001/844/EC, ECSC, Euratom amending the Commission's internal Rules of Procedure (OJ L 317, 3.12.2001, p. 1–55).

¹¹ The security scrutiny does not concern other issues or 'activities involving dual-use goods or dangerous materials and substances'.

¹² Unless the applicant have already included them in the proposal, the KDT JU operational services managing the call/the Commission may request the following:

- a 'Security Aspect Letter (SAL)' and 'Security Classification Guide (SCG) 3', covering the level of classification of background information (and the formal written authorisation by the competent security authorities to use this information);
- the classified results (including which participant will have access to what information).
- a copy of the 'Facility Security Clearances (FSC)' (or of the FSC request).

The validity of the FSC may be checked by the Commission Security Directorate through the appropriate formal channel with the national security authorities (NSAs) involved.

III.7. Complaints

1. If the applicants consider that the submission of their proposal was not entirely successful due to a technical error on the side of the KDT JU/EC IT systems involved, the coordinator may lodge a complaint through the IT Helpdesk on the Funding and Tenders Portal/ Single Electronic Data Interchange Area (SEDIA). For the complaint to be admissible it must be filed by the coordinator within four (4) calendar days following that of the call closure¹³.
2. If the applicants consider that the KDT JU unduly rejected their proposal, the coordinator may file a complaint via the Funding and Tenders Portal .
3. For specific complaints concerning the evaluation of proposal, the coordinator may — within thirty (30) days of receiving the proposal rejection letter — file a request for an evaluation review via the Funding and Tenders Portal/ Single Electronic Data Interchange Area (SEDIA), using the on-line forms provided. The KDT JU shall thus convene the internal evaluation review committee to examine the complaints. The internal evaluation review shall assess solely the procedural aspects of the evaluation, without deciding on the merits of the proposal.
4. If the complaint is justified, the KDT JU will arrange for a re-evaluation and inform the coordinator. If the complaint is not justified, the KDT JU will inform the coordinator, together with the reasons why.

The equivalent procedure as for complaints concerning the evaluation of proposals shall apply for complaints concerning the outcome of the admissibility and eligibility check.

III.8. Eligibility check by participating states and financial capacity check

1. Participating states shall verify the eligibility of their listed applicants against any predetermined national criteria for funding as published with the call. The Executive Director shall verify the eligibility of all the listed applicants for funding from the Union according to the KDT JU Financial Rules and the criteria published with the call. The results of those

¹³ The following procedure will apply for applicants:

Applicant will receive an acknowledgement of receipt the same or next working day.

Applicant should secure a PDF version of all the B-parts and annexes of their proposal holding a time stamp (file attributes listing the date and time of creation and last modification) that is prior to the call deadline dd/mm/yyyy:hh:mm , as well as any proof of the alleged failure (e.g. screen shots). Later in the procedure applicant may be requested by the IT Helpdesk to provide these items.

Any information regarding the proposal shall be treated in a strictly confidential manner. In order that a complaint would be upheld, the IT audit trail (application log files and access log files of the EC/KDT JU IT-systems involved) must show that there was indeed a technical problem at the EC/KDT JU side which prevented the applicant from submitting (or resubmitting) the proposal using the electronic submission system. Applicants shall be notified about the outcome of the treatment of their complaint as soon as possible and at latest within 15 working days following the reception of their complaint. If a decision cannot be reached in this term applicants shall receive a holding reply.

If a complaint is upheld, the secured files (provided by you to the IT helpdesk), for which the investigation has demonstrated that technical problems at the EC side prevented (re)submitting, will be used as a reference for accepting the proposal for subsequent evaluation. In absence of such documents, the version present in the IT system will be evaluated.

verifications by the national authorities and the Executive Director shall be available at least twenty (20) days before the PAB meets to discuss the selection of proposals and the allocation of public funding. Applicants shall be informed on the results of those verifications as part of step III.9(8).

2. The public authorities shall be given the opportunity to express a score for each proposal above threshold with which they are financially concerned, to reflect the level of synergy of the proposed work with EU and national R&D&I policies. They may also abstain from scoring or declare themselves neutral. A neutral score supports the order of the "above threshold" list produced by the experts.
3. The Executive Director shall consolidate the individual public authorities' scores per proposal based on a mechanism previously approved by the PAB. The consolidation of the scores shall be based on the following principles, listed in order of importance:
 - a) The weight of the score of a public authority shall be determined in proportion to the estimated expenditure of that public authority for the call.
 - b) The score of an KDT Participating State shall have greater impact on the projects demanding higher national contributions from that State.
 - c) The consolidated score of the public authorities may eventually move a proposal at most half way of the ranking established by the experts.
4. Based on the evaluation results and the scoring by the public authorities, the Executive Director shall elaborate the draft final ranking list with the draft allocation of public funding as well as any other observations and suggestions before the PAB proceeds with the selection decision.

III.9 PAB Selection decision and allocation of public funding

1. On the basis of the draft final ranking list and the draft allocation of funding, the PAB shall decide on the final ranking of proposals.
2. Following this decision, the PAB shall decide on the selection of proposals to be retained for public funding, taking into account the budgets available and the verifications of the eligibility for funding of individual applicants made earlier. The PAB shall also decide which proposals are not viable in the light of the available public funding.
3. The national expenditure estimated by an KDT Participating State for Calls shall normally be dedicated to cover a percentage of the eligible costs of the participants in projects established in its territory. Nevertheless, an KDT Participating State may decide to fund organisations established in other EU Member States or Associated States of the Framework Programme.
4. In this case, the "host" KDT Participating State shall bear the same rights, responsibilities and obligations with respect to this "foreign" participant as if such participant was based in the host KDT Participating State (as specified in the administrative arrangements concluded between the KDT JU and the host KDT Participating State e.g. in terms of grant agreements, audits and cost claims). Participating states may also allocate national funding beyond their estimated expenditure for the Call.

5. In case that the total funding allocated by an KDT Participating State is less than the expenditure estimated for the Call, that State may allocate the difference to applicants in proposals that would not be viable without further funding. Alternatively, the non-allocated amounts may remain unused by the KDT Participating State in the specific call.
6. In case the total EU funding allocated is less than the expenditure foreseen for the Call, the non-allocated amount may be de-committed and reused in up to the next 3 years.
7. The PAB may decide to create a reserve list of proposals in case funding would become available (e.g. following failure to conclude a grant agreement in a reasonable time after the PAB decision). Such a list shall be made of the proposals that are not viable for reasons of budget availability following the decisions above. It shall be ordered according to the final ranking as decided under step III.9 (1).
8. Following the evaluation and PAB mandate to Executive Director, and within a maximum period of 5 months from the deadline for submission of FPPs, the Executive Director shall communicate the PAB decision on selection (including any budget changes resulting from the PAB decision) to applicants.

The results of the evaluation (ESRs) shall be communicated to applicants at the latest at the same time as the communication of the PAB decision on selection.

9. The Executive Director shall invite the coordinators to the Grant Agreement Preparation phase through the electronic exchange system.

III.10. PAB Mandate to Executive Director

1. For each proposal retained for funding, the PAB shall give the Executive Director a mandate to prepare the JU grant agreement. To that end, the KDT JU operational services managing the call shall prepare, under the responsibility of the Executive Director, the 'Description of action' within the limits of the PAB mandate¹⁴.
 - a) In case that the grant preparation has been successfully completed within the mandate, the Executive Director shall transmit the results to the PAB and the corresponding national funding authorities of the participants in the projects together with all relevant documentation in order to proceed, where relevant, with the establishment of the national grant agreements.
 - b) In cases of substantial changes not foreseen by the PAB mandate (such as the unexpected withdrawal of a partner), the Executive Director shall transmit a 'Project change request' to the PAB for approval. If the change request is approved, the decision of the PAB shall be transmitted by the Executive Director to the corresponding national funding authorities of the participants in the project together with all relevant documentation in order to proceed with the establishment of the national grant agreements, where appropriate.
 - c) In case of failure of the grant preparation, or in case of change requests refused by the PAB, the consortium shall be considered as unsuccessful. The KDT JU shall inform the unsuccessful consortia and the corresponding national funding authorities.

¹⁴ The mandate shall include if appropriate the results of verifications carried out by the public authorities (early warning, outstanding legal and/or financial obligations, etc.) as well as the modifications in budget and possible changes in the consortia due to the non-eligibility of partners.

IV Grant agreements

1. After a successful preparation, the KDT JU shall transmit to the coordinators of the selected consortia the Joint Undertaking's grant agreement and the accession forms for electronic signature, in the terms and conditions specified by the grant agreement. The grant agreements shall be signed within a maximum period of 8 months from the deadline of submission of FPP (step III.9.(8)).

The decision of the PAB on the allocation of public funding to Projects shall be binding for the Participating states without any further local evaluation or selection processes. In particular:

- The KDT JU shall conclude grant agreements with consortia of selected projects for the contribution of the EU and of participating states having decided to entrust the KDT JU with the implementation of their contribution.
- Where applicable, the funding bodies responsible for fulfilling the obligations of Participating States shall establish grant agreements with partners in selected projects, according to the local financial and legal requirements.
- The approved “Description of action” for each project as established by the KDT JU shall be used without change¹⁵ for the JU Grant Agreement and, where applicable, for the grant agreements in KDT Participating States.
- The administrative and financial conditions of the JU grant agreements shall be governed by the Rules for Participation in Horizon Europe, the KDT JU Financial Rules and the administrative arrangements between the KDT JU and the KDT Participating States, if appropriate.

Where relevant, participating states shall make best efforts to synchronize and accelerate their procedures for concluding their own grant agreements.

¹⁵ Except for translations if necessary

Appendix 1 Code of conduct

1. PERFORMING THE WORK

1.1 The expert must work independently, in a personal capacity and not on behalf of any organisation.

1.2 The expert must:

- (a) evaluate each proposal in a confidential and fair way
- (b) perform his/her work to the best of his/her abilities, professional skills, knowledge and applying the highest ethical and moral standards;
- (c) follow the instructions and time-schedule given by the KDT Joint Undertaking.

1.3 The expert may not delegate the work to another person or be replaced by another person.

1.4 If a person or entity involved in a proposal approaches the expert before or during the evaluation, s/he must immediately inform the KDT Joint Undertaking.

1.5 The expert may not be (or become) involved in any of the actions resulting from the proposal(s) that s/he evaluated (at any stage of the procedure, including for two-stage calls).

In addition, the expert may not be (or become) involved in the preparation of a proposal at the second stage of a two-stage call, if s/he participated in the evaluation of the first stage.

2. IMPARTIALITY

2.1 The expert must perform his/her work **impartially** and take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the work is compromised

for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ('**conflict of interests**').

The following situations will **automatically** be considered as **conflict of interest**:

- (a) **for a proposal s/he is requested to evaluate**, if s/he:
- (i) was involved in the preparation of the proposal;
 - (ii) is a director, trustee or partner or is in any way involved in the management of an applicant (or linked third party or other third party involved in the action);
 - (iii) is employed or contracted by one of the applicants (or linked third parties, named subcontractors or other third parties involved in the action).

In this case, the expert must be excluded from the evaluation of the proposal concerned (and may not take part in the consensus group, panel review or hearings when the proposal is being discussed). Part(s) of an evaluation to which the expert already participated must be declared void. Comments and scores already given must be discounted. If necessary, the expert must be replaced and the proposal concerned must be re-evaluated.

However, in exceptional and duly justified cases, the responsible KDT Joint Undertaking staff may decide to nevertheless invite the expert to take part in the panel meeting if:

- the expert works in a different department/laboratory/institute from the one where the action is to be carried out and
- the departments/laboratories/institutes within the organisation concerned operate with a high degree of autonomy and
- the participation is justified by the requirement to appoint the best available experts and by the limited size of the pool of qualified experts.

In this case, the other experts in the group of evaluators will be informed about the situation of the expert.

- (b) **for a proposal s/he is requested to evaluate AND for all proposals competing for the same call budget-split**, if s/he:
- (i) was involved in the preparation of any proposal submitted to the same topic/other topic;
 - (ii) would benefit if any proposal submitted to the same topic/other topic within the same call budget-split is accepted or rejected;

- (iii) has close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.) or other close personal relationship with a person (including linked third parties or other third parties) involved in the preparation of any proposal submitted to the same topic/other topic within the same call budget-split or with a person which would benefit if such a proposal is accepted or rejected.

In this case, the expert must be excluded from the evaluation of the proposal concerned AND from all the proposals competing for the same call budget-split. Part(s) of an evaluation to which the expert already participated must be declared void. Comments and scores already given must be discounted. If necessary, the expert must be replaced and the proposals concerned must be re-evaluated.

(c) **for ALL proposals under the call in question**, if s/he:

- (i) is a member of an advisory group set up by the Commission to advise on the preparation of EU or Horizon Europe work programmes or work programmes in an area related to the call in question;
- (ii) is a National Contact Point (NCP) or is working for the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN);
- (iii) is a member of a programme committee.

In this case, the expert must be excluded from the evaluation of the call concerned. Part(s) of an evaluation to which the expert already participated must be declared void. Comments and scores already given must be discounted. If necessary, the expert must be replaced and the proposals concerned must be re-evaluated.

The following situations **may be** considered as **conflict of interest** if the responsible KDT Joint Undertaking staff so decides in view of the objective circumstances, the available information and the potential risks:

- (a) employment of the expert by one of the applicants (or linked third parties or other third parties involved in the action) in the last three years;
- (b) involvement of the expert in a contract, grant, prize or membership of management structures (e.g. member of management or advisory board etc.) or research collaboration with an applicant, a linked third party or another third party involved in the action in the last three years;
- (c) any other situation that could cast doubt on his/her ability to participate in the evaluation impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an outside third party.

In this case, the responsible KDT Joint Undertaking staff may decide to exclude the expert from the evaluation (and on the scope, i.e. only for the proposal concerned or also for competing proposals or the entire call) and, if necessary, to replace him/her and organise a re-evaluation.

2.2 The expert will be required to **confirm** — for each proposal s/he is evaluating — that there is no conflict of interest, by signing a declaration in the Participant Portal electronic exchange system (see Article 21).

If the expert is (or becomes) aware of a conflict of interest, s/he must immediately **inform** the responsible KDT Joint Undertaking staff and stop working until further instructions.

2.3 If the expert breaches any of his/her obligations under Points 2.1 and 2.2, the KDT Joint Undertaking may apply the measures set out in Chapter 5, and in particular terminate the Contract (see Article 17).

3. CONFIDENTIALITY

3.1 During implementation of the Contract and for five years after the date of the last payment, the expert must keep confidential all data, documents or other material (in any form) that is disclosed (in writing or orally) and that concerns the work under the Contract (**‘confidential information’**).

Unless otherwise agreed with the responsible KDT Joint Undertaking staff, s/he may use confidential information only to implement the Contract.

The expert must keep his/her work under the Contract strictly confidential, and in particular:

- (a) not disclose (directly or indirectly) any confidential information relating to proposals or applicants, without prior written approval by the KDT Joint Undertaking;
- (b) not discuss proposal(s) with others (including other experts or KDT Joint Undertaking staff that are not directly involved in the evaluation of the proposal(s), except during evaluation meetings and with prior approval by the responsible KDT Joint Undertaking staff ;
- (c) not disclose:
 - details on the evaluation process or its outcome, without prior written approval by the KDT Joint Undertaking;
 - details on his/her position/advice;
 - the names of other experts participating in the evaluation.
- (d) not communicate with applicants (including linked third parties or other third parties involved in the actions) during the evaluation or afterwards — except in panel hearings.

If the KDT Joint Undertaking makes documents or information available electronically for remote work, the expert is responsible for ensuring adequate

protection and for returning, erasing or destroying all confidential information after the end of the evaluation (if so instructed).

If the expert works on KDT Joint Undertaking premises, the expert:

- (a) may not remove from the premises any documents, material or information on the proposal(s) or on the evaluation;
- (b) is responsible for ensuring adequate protection of electronic documents and information and for returning, erasing or destroying all confidential information after the end of the evaluation (if so instructed).

If the expert uses outside sources (for example internet, specialised databases, third party expertise etc.) for his/her evaluation, s/he:

- (a) must respect the general rules for using such sources;
- (b) may not contact third parties, without prior written approval by the KDT Joint Undertaking.

The confidentiality obligations **no longer apply** if:

- the KDT Joint Undertaking agrees to release the expert from the confidentiality obligations;
- the confidential information becomes public through other channels;
- disclosure of the confidential information is required by law.

3.2 If the expert breaches any of his/her obligations under Point 3.1, the KDT Joint Undertaking may apply the measures set out in Chapter 5.

Appendix 2 - Rules of procedure for Sub-Panels and Panels

Aim

A procedure (Sub-Panels) is implemented to provide harmonization/alignment of the scoring teams of experts. It follows an established model with two subsequent sets of sessions with the sub-panels taking place before the final panel(s). There is one sub-panel dedicated to each evaluation criterion: e.g. one for EXCELLENCE, one for IMPACT, one for IMPLEMENTATION, etc.). The sub-panels can take place subsequently (one after another) or at the same time (parallel sessions) due to time constraints. If several calls are evaluated at the same time and providing that the evaluations criteria for each call are the same or very similar (minor differences) the proposals from these calls can be discussed in the same sub-panels (i.e. the sub-panel addressing EXCELLENCE criterion can include proposals from a RIA Call and a IA Call).

The output of the sub-panels is taken over for the final decision in the Final Panel(s). If several calls are evaluated at the same time (i.e. a RIA and a IA Call) there will be a dedicated Final Panel for each call.

Organisation of the sub-panels/panels is described below:

Background

Each sub-panel strives to ensure the highest level of consistency possible between the scores given in the CRs (consensus reports) and the corresponding evaluation texts across all the proposals evaluated: similar text contents should have similar scoring. To implement the procedure, the text of each criterion is extracted from the consensus reports together with its corresponding score and rendered anonymous (i.e., the name of the proposal was blacked out and the proposals receive a random number: e.g. RIA 1, RIA2, IA7, IA9, etc.) in order to ensure an objective assessment by all the sub-panel members. This step is carried out by the KDT JU office. The 3 sub-panel discussions occur concomitantly (parallel sessions).

The sub-panel moderator presents the text and its corresponding score to the experts participating in the respective panel for appreciation. The sub-panel then assess the text-score for each proposal and decides either to accept the text and the score (good match) or suggest to revise either the text or the score if the panel estimates that they do not match.

The sub-panels can also check the quality control of the written remarks/comments/recommendations and it may propose the evaluating experts a clearer text and style improvements, as well.

At the end of the sub-panels exercise, the outcome of the discussions is collected by the KDT JU office (from each of the sub-panel moderator) and compiled at proposal level (all the criteria for each proposal). It is then communicated to the team of experts that evaluated

the proposal (prepared the CRs). They are given the opportunity to convene together and discuss on the action to take on the suggestions proposed by the subpanels. They communicate the final decision they reached to the final panel. This decision could be either an acceptance (full or partial) or disagreement with the panels' suggestions.

In case of a disagreement between the original evaluators and the suggestions of the subpanels, the opinion of the experts who originally read and evaluated the proposal is preferred but the final decision stays with the final panel.

The final panel approves or disapproves all suggested changes of scores or texts and establishes the final ranking.

Composition of the sub-panels/Panels

For a better harmonization the maximum possible number of experts is allocated to each sub-panel. As a rule to decide the number of experts assigned to each sub-panel the total number of experts taking part in the evaluations is divided by the number of criteria. For criteria where a specific background might be useful care will be taken by the KDT staff to take into account these factors when assigning the experts to the sub-panels. For example for the sub-panel addressing the criterion IMPACT, where business background is generally appreciated, experts who have indicated more business experience in their profiles are given a preference. At the same time care is taken that a balanced distribution of the experts for each panel is ensured concerning the gender, background (industry/academia), nationality, etc.

Each sub-panel is moderated by a Programme Officer and another KDT JU staff member will record the minutes and register all the suggestions made by the experts in the respective sub-panel. The changes made following the sub-panels (final decision taken in the Final Panel(s)!) are implemented directly in the ESRs by the KDT JU staff (generally the Programme Officers that monitored the respective Consensus Group meetings). Due to the specific set up of the SEP evaluation system it is not possible for the team of experts to make changes to the CRs anymore.

The Final Panel(s) is/are chaired by the Call Coordinator and/or Head of Programmes and one/two KDT JU staff members will record the minutes. The final panel is attended by all experts participating to the evaluations, except the ones with declared conflict of interest. The latter are requested to leave the room during the discussion of the respective proposals. One or several KDT JU staff members will assist the experts that need to temporary leave the room due to conflicts of interest.

Sub-Panel/ Panel Organization

In order to ensure the best possible quality of sub-panels' results and to avoid interferences due to the conflicts of interest, the materials presented to the experts in the sub-panels are rendered anonymous (i.e., not leading to possible identification of proposals). To achieve

this, the experts are also requested not to use the proposal acronym, nor its number, nor the names of the beneficiaries in the consensus reports. During the sub-panels, experts who may recognize their texts are requested not to reveal the identity of the proposal to the other participants in the sub-panel.

In the sub-panels, the proposals are introduced with code names (e.g. RIA 1, IA 9) and the order in which they are presented is scrambled so that no link could be made between the code names and the proposal name/acronym.

Sub-Panels / Panel minutes

The sub-panels and panel(s) results/outcome are recorded in sub-panels/panel(s) reports by KDT JU staff members as above-mentioned.

At the end of the Final Panel meeting all the participating experts will sign the ranking list established in the Panel, which captures the decisions of the Final Panel.