

## EMPIR Call Process Guide 6: Evaluating EMPIR Projects

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## Guide 6: Evaluating EMPIR Projects

The European Commission have given EURAMET permission to work ahead of contract by issuing Stage 1 calls for 2014. EURAMET will also launch the Stage 2 Calls and SIP Call ahead of contract. **The funding of any selected project, and the terms and conditions of participation in the projects, are dependent on completion of the contractual processes between the European Commission and EURAMET.**

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If you require further help or guidance after reading this document, please contact the helpline

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## 1 Scope

This Guide explains how to evaluate proposals for EMPIR Calls and the responsibilities of the people involved.

It does not include:

- Form 6a: Code of Conduct and Declaration
- Form 6b: Payment to Referees
- Form 6c: Joint Research Project (JRP) Evaluation
- Form 6d: Support for Impact Project (SIP) Evaluation
- Information on eligibility, this is described in "Guide 1: Admissibility and Eligibility for EMPIR Calls"
- Information on writing a proposal, this is described in "Guide 4: Writing Joint Research Projects (JRPs)" and "Guide 7: Writing Support for Impact Projects (SIPs)"
- Information on resourcing and costing a proposal, this is described in "Guide 5: Administrative data for EMPIR Projects"

Details for specific calls (e.g. budget, evaluation weightings and relevant dates) can be found in the Budget and Features document at [msu.euramet.org](http://msu.euramet.org).

## 2 Background to the calls

The European Metrology Programme for Innovation and Research (EMPIR) aims, through European integration, to develop new measurement capabilities that have strategic impact for Europe, with the overall goal of accelerating innovation and competitiveness, generating data and knowledge necessary to improve quality of life, and providing better tools for the scientific community. It is funded by the EMPIR participating states and the EU. The national funding supports the Internal Funded Partners (the EURAMET NMIs and DIs) and they consequently receive a lower EU Contribution than the External Funded Partners. Projects must be coordinated by an Internal Funded Partner.

EURAMET currently issues calls for two types of EMPIR project – Joint Research Projects (JRPs) which are "Research and Innovation Actions" in Horizon 2020 terms, and Support for Impact Projects (SIPs) which are "Coordination and Support Actions". JRPs are submitted in response to a Selected Research Topic (SRT) published by EURAMET which defines the objectives to be achieved by the proposers. The SRTs are generated from information supplied in an earlier stage of the call. SIPs are submitted in response to a Call Scope which will often restrict proposals to actions designed to ensure the outputs of previously completed projects are exploited fully.

## 3 Referees

EURAMET appoints independent expert referees to assist with the evaluation of proposals for EMPIR calls. "Guide 8: Registering as a referee for EMPIR" explains how to register as a referee.

EURAMET takes all reasonable steps to ensure that referees are not faced with a conflict of interest between their own research/business interests, and their evaluation activities for EURAMET. All referees must abide by a Code of Conduct and sign "Form 6a: Code of Conduct and Declaration" prior to beginning any evaluation.

For some types of project, referees must attend a review conference or consensus group meeting for the evaluation of proposals. In this case the EURAMET Management Support Unit (MSU) will liaise with referees in order to arrange the administration and logistics.

### 3.1 Appointment of referees

To evaluate the proposals submitted, EURAMET compiles a pool of appropriate referees and then selects referees from the pool. When selecting EURAMET looks for a high level of skill, experience and knowledge in the relevant areas. Providing this condition can be satisfied EURAMET then seeks a balance in terms of:

- skills, experience and knowledge,
- geographical diversity,
- gender,
- where appropriate, the private and public sectors and,
- an appropriate turnover of referees from year to year.

A proposal will be evaluated by at least three appropriate referees.

## 4 Evaluation process

### 4.1 Evaluation criteria for proposals

The three evaluation criteria for proposals are:

1. Excellence
2. Impact
3. The quality and efficiency of the implementation

“Form 6c: JRP Evaluation” and “Form 6d: SIP Evaluation” detail the aspects that will be taken into account for each criteria.

### 4.2 Prior to evaluation

EURAMET will check the eligibility of each proposal and only eligible proposals are evaluated. Where eligibility is not met the proposal will be withdrawn and the proposers informed. If ineligibility is discovered at a later time during the evaluation process, the proposal will be withdrawn.

Where there is a doubt on the eligibility of a proposal, EURAMET reserves the right to proceed with the evaluation, pending a final decision on eligibility. The fact that a proposal is evaluated in such circumstances does not constitute proof of its eligibility.

### 4.3 Principles of evaluation

All proposals are evaluated against the evaluation criteria in “Form 6c: JRP Evaluation” or “Form 6d: SIP Evaluation”. They are evaluated as presented, on their own merit and all proposals are treated equally.

EURAMET takes all reasonable steps to ensure confidentiality of proposals, before, during and after evaluation. Referees are required to maintain the confidentiality of all information contained within the proposals they evaluate, and of the evaluation outcomes.

Any proposal which contravenes fundamental ethical principles or which does not fulfil any conditions set out in the EMPIR call may be excluded from evaluation at any time. In clear-cut cases (e.g. a proposal which does not include the required number of partners), the proposal may be ruled out of scope without referring it to referees.

Due to the limited time EURAMET has between announcing the selection of projects and contract signature, opportunities for negotiation will be limited and

- Referees must evaluate each proposal as submitted and not on its potential if certain changes were to be made
- If referees identify shortcomings (other than minor ones and obvious clerical errors), they must reflect those in a lower score for the relevant criterion
- Referees only explain the shortcomings, and do not make recommendations i.e. do not suggest additional partners, additional work packages, resources cut...
- Proposals with significant weaknesses that prevent the project from achieving its objectives or with resources being seriously over-estimated must not receive above-threshold scores

## 4.4 Operational capacity

Based on the information provided in the proposal, the referees are asked to judge whether each of the partners in the proposal possess the basic operational capacity to carry out the proposed work. If they judge that this is not the case, then they are asked to indicate the partner(s) concerned and provide a short explanation. In any case they continue to evaluate the full proposal, taking into account all partners and activities.

## 4.5 Evaluation

### 4.5.1 Referees' individual preliminary assessment

In order to prepare, a few weeks prior to evaluation, each referee will be emailed by the MSU, links to the proposal(s) to be evaluated and other relevant supporting documents for the EMPIR Call.

Using this information referees should:

- Familiarise themselves with the evaluation criteria and read “Form 6c: JRP Evaluation” and “Form 6d: SIP Evaluation”.
- Understand the impact and the implementation requirements of proposals by reading “Guide 4: Writing Joint Research Projects” or “Guide 7: Writing Support for Impact Projects” as appropriate.
- Read all proposals assigned to them and form an initial opinion about each proposal.
- Note any key issues, or areas that need clarification or comment, and if attending the review conference, formulate questions that they may wish to ask the consortium representative at the review conference.
- Referees can privately mark each proposal against the evaluation criteria given on Form 6c or 6d. Then if they are attending the:
  - review conference, referees should note that their opinion is private and only the final consensus mark (agreed by all referees) is collected by EURAMET at the review conference.
  - consensus group meeting, referees should email their completed Form(s) 6c or 6d to [msu@npl.co.uk](mailto:msu@npl.co.uk) 2 weeks prior to the consensus group meeting.
- Email the MSU if they discover a conflict of interest, or find that the research is outside of their area of expertise. However, please note that it is beneficial to have some referees with general rather than very specific expertise.

There are key sections in proposals where referees will find information most relevant to evaluation:

- Section B of the proposal should give an overview of the proposed research against the three evaluation criteria.
- Section E of the proposal should give a description of each participant; in order for referees to complete the operational capacity check for the consortium.

However, referees may find the remaining sections of the proposal useful.

Referees may also choose to read other proposals (in the TP they are assigned to) for comparison with those assigned to them. If they do, it should be sufficient to read Section B of these proposals.

Referees must NOT discuss proposals with proposers or other referees at this time.

### 4.5.2 Review conference

For the evaluation of some projects, referees must attend a review conference. In this case the EURAMET MSU will liaise with referees in order arrange the administration and logistics of the review conference.

The review conference includes the following activities (in chronological order):

- Briefings on the evaluation process.

- The poster session where referees clarify their understanding of proposals through informal discussions with a consortium representative (around 20 minutes per proposal).
- A private referee group meeting. In this first private meeting referees share their initial opinions and formulate formal questions for each proposal. One referee (who is a specialist in the proposal topic) will lead the discussions, which last around 15 minutes per proposal.
- The formal question and answer session between the referees and the consortium representative.
- A private referee group meeting. In this second private meeting referees discuss each proposal. One referee (who is a specialist in the proposal topic) will lead the discussions, which last around 30 minutes per proposal. For each proposal:
  - Referees must agree a consensus on the marks and comments for each evaluation criterion and complete one Form 6c or 6d in the marking book. Each evaluation criterion will be scored out of 5. The threshold for individual evaluation criteria will be 3 and the overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores will be 10. If a proposal has scored less than this, it cannot be funded.
  - Referees must agree a consensus on whether each of the participants meet the selection criterion related to operational capacity.
  - All referees in the group must sign the marking books.
- A “draft ranked list” of all proposals is formed based on the referee’s marks and the weightings given in the Budget and Features document. Where two or more proposals receive the same weighted score, the referees will attempt to separate them in the “draft ranked list” through discussion and a vote.
- The referees agree the final “draft ranked list”, which will then be recommended to the EMPIR Committee for confirmation.

#### 4.5.3 Consensus group meeting

For the evaluation of some projects, referees must attend a consensus group meeting. In this case the EURAMET MSU will liaise with referees in order to arrange the administration and logistics of the consensus group meeting.

The consensus group meeting includes the following activities:

- Briefings on the evaluation process.
- A private referee group meeting. In this meeting referees discuss each proposal; one referee (who is a specialist in the proposal topic) will lead the discussions. For each proposal:
  - Referees must agree a consensus on the marks and comments for each evaluation criterion and complete one Form 6c or 6d in the marking book. Each evaluation criterion will be scored out of 5. The threshold for individual evaluation criteria will be 3 and the overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores will be 10. If a proposal has scored less than this, it cannot be funded.
  - Referees must agree a consensus on whether each of the participants meet the selection criterion related to operational capacity.
  - All referees in the group must sign the marking books.
- A “draft ranked list” of all proposals is formed based on the referee’s marks and the weightings given in the Budget and Features document. Where two or more proposals receive the same score, the referees will attempt to separate them in the “draft ranked list” through discussion and a vote.
- The referees agree the final “draft ranked list”, which will then be recommended to the EMPIR Committee for confirmation.

## 4.6 Confirming the ranked list

If the referees decide not to separate any ties around the budget line then the proposals will be separated:

- first by giving more weight to the evaluation criteria with the largest weight for that TP,
- then by selecting projects that allow the target external participation for the TP to be met most closely,
- and finally, selecting projects that allow the overall target external participation for the programme as a whole to be met most closely.

The EMPIR Committee agree which proposals to fund based on the ranked list and recommendations of the referees and the available budget. Generally proposals will be funded in rank order until the available budget is spent but the EMPIR Committee may adjust the distribution of the budget between TPs or decide to leave some budget unallocated.

The selection of proposals to be funded will be formally announced on the date given in the Budget and Features document.

## 5 Marking guidance

One completed Form 6c or 6d is required per proposal.

- There are three evaluation criteria for proposals.
- Form 6c contains aspects to be taken into account for each criterion, but these should not be directly marked against.
- Each evaluation criterion will be scored out of 5; half marks may be given.
- The threshold for individual evaluation criteria will be 3 and the overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores will be 10. If a proposal has scored less than this, it cannot be funded.
- In some calls the evaluation criteria may be weighted after marking; this occurs at the decision of the EMPIR Committee as indicated in the “Budget and Features” for the call.
- Consensus comments must be given to support the scores given and provide feedback to the consortia.

<b>0 =</b>	<b>Fail:</b> fails to address the criterion under examination, or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information
<b>1 =</b>	<b>Poor:</b> there are serious inherent weaknesses in relation to the criterion in question, or the criterion is addressed in a cursory and unsatisfactory manner.
<b>2 =</b>	<b>Fair:</b> broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses that would need correcting.
<b>3 =</b>	<b>Good:</b> addresses the criterion well, although certain improvements are possible.
<b>4 =</b>	<b>Very Good:</b> successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.
<b>5 =</b>	<b>Excellent:</b> demonstrates excellence in this criterion.

## 6 Roles and Responsibilities

### 6.1 EMPIR Committee Members

The EMPIR Committee members are responsible for implementing EMPIR and the selection of the proposals to be funded taking into account the advice from the referees.

The EMPIR Committee members may not attempt to influence the opinion of the referees or express any opinion to the referees on the merits or otherwise of any proposal.

## **6.2 The EMPIR Chair and Deputy EMPIR Chair**

The EMPIR Chair, and their deputy, are responsible for approving the selection of the referees and the evaluation review procedure.

The EMPIR Chair and deputy EMPIR Chair may not attempt to influence the opinion of the referees or express any opinion to the referees on the merits or otherwise of any proposal.

## **6.3 Management Support Unit**

The EURAMET Management Support Unit (MSU) operates under the guidance of the EMPIR Committee and is responsible for:

- Arranging the administration and logistics of the evaluation of proposals, including the review conference and consensus group meeting(s).
- Checking the admissibility and eligibility of proposals.
- Recording the outcome of evaluations.
- Dealing with expenses claims and the honorarium for referees.
- Negotiating contracts for successful proposals.

MSU staff may act as moderators in discussions at the review conference and consensus group meeting(s). The moderator seeks consensus between the referees, without any prejudice for or against particular proposals or the organisations involved, and may assist with details of the processes involved.

MSU staff will not attempt to influence the opinion of the referees and must not express any opinion on the merits or otherwise of any proposal.

## **6.4 Referees**

Referees are independent experts, acting in a personal capacity, and when performing the evaluation must not represent any organisation, national interest, or other entity. Referees must declare any links to a particular consortium and must sign "Form 6a: Code of Conduct and Declaration" prior to beginning any evaluation.

The referees are responsible for:

- Maintaining the confidentiality of the documents they are assessing.
- Evaluating the merits of each application against the given evaluation criteria.
- Reporting results of the evaluation to EURAMET on the relevant forms.
- Deleting or destroying all documents after evaluation.
- Informing EURAMET of any conflict of interest.

## **6.5 The European Commission's Independent Observer and Representative**

The European Commission may send an 'Independent Observer' to the review conference and consensus group meeting(s). He/she does not participate directly in the evaluation procedure. He/she will have access to all areas of the evaluation process, and will report back his/her observations and opinions on the process to the European Commission.

The European Commission may also send a representative to the review conference and consensus group meeting(s).

## **7 Evaluation review procedure**

If a proposer considers that the evaluation of their proposal has not been carried out in accordance with the Horizon 2020 rules for Participation, the relevant work plan or the call for proposals, they can request a review. A request for review shall relate to a specific proposal, and shall be submitted by the coordinator of the proposal to [msu@npl.co.uk](mailto:msu@npl.co.uk) within 30 days of the date on which EURAMET informs the coordinator of the evaluation results.

On receipt of a request for review, EURAMET will form an evaluation review committee composed of the EMPIR Chair or their deputy and two other members of the EMPIR Committee.

The examination shall cover only the procedural aspects of the evaluation, and not the merits of the proposal.

The evaluation review committee shall provide an opinion on the procedural aspects of the evaluation process. The committee may recommend one of the following:

- re-evaluation of the proposal primarily by evaluators not involved in the previous evaluation;
- confirmation of the initial evaluation.

On the basis of this recommendation, a decision shall be taken by EURAMET and notified to the coordinator of the proposal. EURAMET will take such decision without undue delay.