



## Guidelines for Reviewers

### Introduction

This document aims to provide guidelines for the selection procedure with regard to proposals submitted in response to a Joint Call of EDCTP and one or more Member States and/or private donors/other organisation.

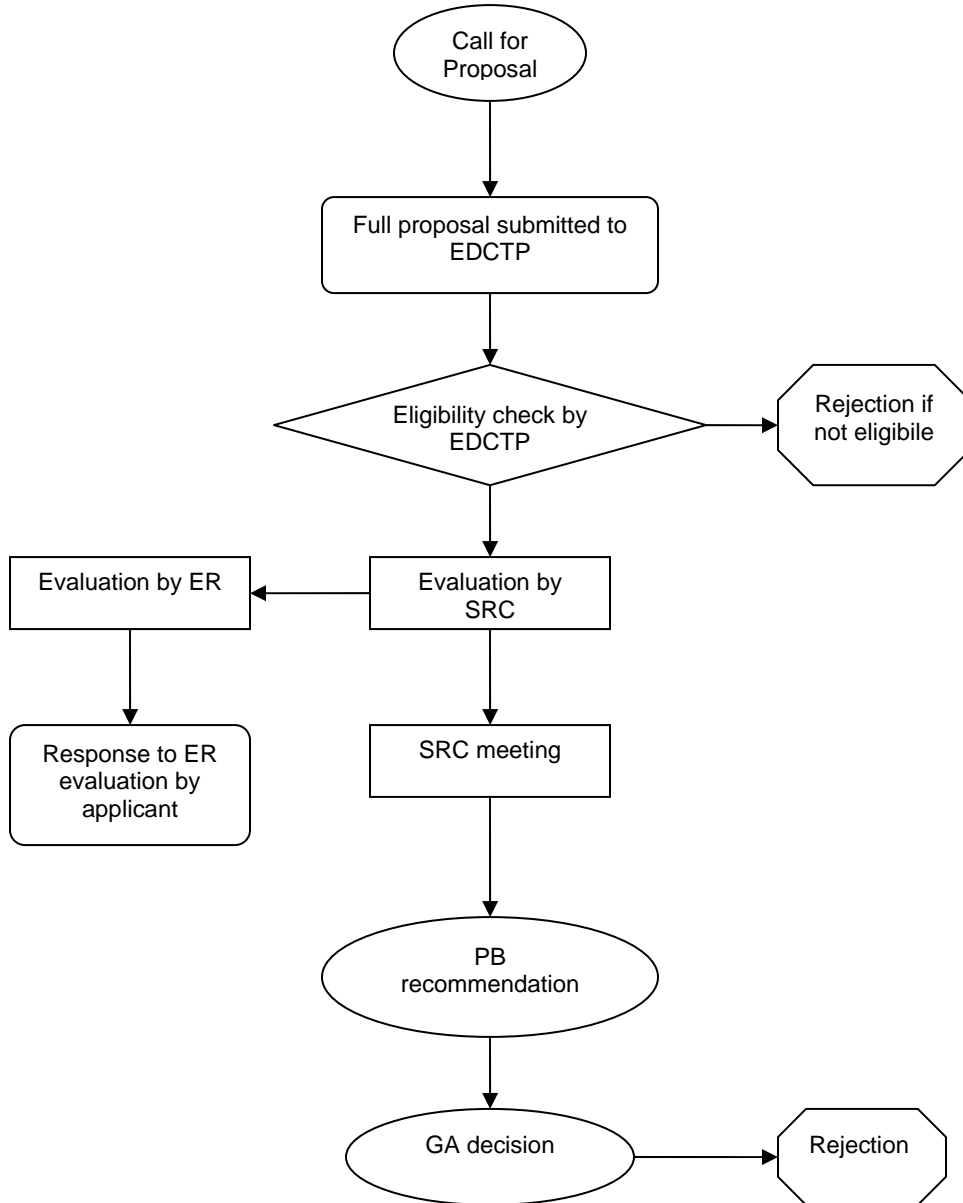
These guidelines describe how the External Referees (ER) and Selection Review Committee (SRC) members are identified and what role they play in the selection procedure. In addition the selection procedure from publication of the Call for Proposals until the final decision of funding by the General Assembly (GA) is described. These guidelines are applicable to a one-stage procedure where applicants directly submit a full proposal in response the Call for Proposals.

In order to ensure a transparent and traceable selection procedure these guidelines are made public and the EDCTP Secretariat will ensure that the implementation will be documented correctly.

### Principles of the selection procedure:

1. **Quality:** all applications for grants need to be positively evaluated to reflect the high scientific merit in the context of EDCTP relevance within the objectives of the Joint Programme
2. **Transparency:** the process of decision-making needs to be described in procedures and be made available to interest parties at request
3. **Equality of treatment:** all applications need to be evaluated in similar procedure, irrespective to their origins or the identity of applicants
4. **Integrity and impartiality:** all applications need to be evaluated in a fair procedure avoiding situations that might interfere or compromise the outcome of the evaluation
5. **Efficiency and speed:** EDCTP aims to ensure that the best possible assessment is being achieved in an independent and smooth running atmosphere free of direct and indirect pressure
6. **Ethical consideration:** any proposal that violates the fundamental ethical principles may be excluded from the selection process at any time

All proposals that fulfil the eligibility criteria will be evaluated against the pre-set selection criteria as described in the Call for Proposals.





## Reviewers

### Terms of reference

EDCTP appoints independent experts to assist in the selection of proposals. EDCTP will ask experts to serve as member of a Scientific Review Committee (SRC) or as External Referees (ER) with the following terms of references:

- 1 To peer-review the full proposal (screen, score, rank) for EDCTP
- 2 To assist EDCTP in identifying priority projects and opportunities for the treatment/prevention of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis or malaria
- 3 To provide external review on project progress as required
- 4 The expert works in a personal capacity and in performing the work does not represent any organisation
- 5 The experts will be accountable to the Executive Director of EDCTP.

### Identification of reviewers

EDCTP identifies possible reviewers through an open Call for Experts, on the basis of their experience and appropriate range of competencies in pre-defined fields. The reviewers are individuals from the fields of science and/or industry, who are internationally recognised in the relevant specialist area, and are expected to have skills and knowledge appropriate to the areas of activities in which they are requested to assist.

All independent experts must also have a high level of professional experience in the public or private sector in one or more of the following areas or activities:

- a. Research in the relevant scientific fields
- b. Evaluation of projects
- c. Use of the results of research and technological development projects
- d. Technology transfer and innovation
- e. International collaboration
- f. Knowledge on the conduct of Clinical Trials is preferable

Experts are expected to have excellent knowledge of English in order to carry out their duties. Experts may come from countries other than EDCTP-EEIG Members States or Sub-Saharan African countries.

Following a Call for Proposals the EDCTP Secretariat will draw up a list of appropriate reviewers from the expert's pool based on their experience and appropriate range of competencies in the pre-defined fields relevant to EDCTP. Candidate reviewers are selected on the basis of their experience and appropriate range of competencies in pre-defined fields relevant to EDCTP. Candidate reviewers **cannot** be (co-) applicants.

The selected reviewers are asked to serve as External Referees or SRC members. Because SRC members are appointed for a three years period their conflict of interest will be re-assessed each time the SRC members are asked to be involved in the review of a new call for proposals. EDCTP will take into account potential conflicts in appointing reviewers according to the EDCTP policy on conflict of interest.

EDCTP conforms to the legislation of The Netherlands concerning the Personal Data Protection Act.



### **Confidentiality and conflict of interest**

A declaration of confidentiality and conflict of interest is sent to all reviewers (ER and SRC members) before the selection of proposals. The reviewers are obliged to maintain the confidentiality of the information contained in the proposals they evaluate and of the selection process and its outcomes and to act with strict impartiality. The reviewers will also declare any potential conflicts of interests with respect to the proposals under review prior to the start of their tasks upon receipt of the names from potential applicants in compliance with EDCTP Policy on Conflict of Interest.

When there are circumstances that may lead to a conflict of interest or circumstances that may be perceived by others to be a conflict of interest, the reviewer is required to divulge sufficient information to EDCTP in order to enable the EDCTP secretariat to determine the case and to agree on the appropriate action.

## **Before the review of applications**

### **Submission of Full Proposal**

Applications are submitted following a Call for Proposals that involves a one-stage submission and selection procedure. Before an applicant submits the Full Proposal he/she should contact the European Networking Officer (ENO) in their respective country. The applicant can contact this ENO through the EDCTP website.

### **Eligibility check**

After receipt of the Full Proposals, EDCTP performs an initial check to verify if the submitted proposals meet the eligibility criteria as referred to in the Call for Proposal. Any proposal not meeting these criteria is excluded from the selection procedure.

If ineligibility becomes apparent in a later stage of the selection process, the proposal will be withdrawn from the evaluation.

### **SRC composition**

The EDCTP Secretariat will appoint a Chair and a Vice-chair for the SRC. The Chair will lead the discussion during the SRC meetings. In case the Chair is absent or has a conflict of interest, the Vice-chair will perform this task. The EDCTP Secretariat will provide all necessary information on the procedure to the (vice) Chair prior to the meeting. The (vice) Chair of the SRC may be requested to act as rapporteur in follow up meetings of the Partnership Board or the General Assembly to clarify the consensus report or the meeting discussion.

## **Overview of Selection procedure**

### **Review of proposals**

EDCTP uses assessment forms as a basis for the review of proposals. At least two ER and two SRC members will be asked to fill in an assessment form for each proposal. The applicants will be given the opportunity to respond in writing to comments made by the ER before the SRC meeting. In preparation for the SRC meeting, all SRC members will be asked to carefully assess the full proposals. At this stage the SRC members will not have access to the comments made by the ER nor to the response of the applicant to these comments nor to the assessment forms filled in by their fellow SRC members.



EDCTP prepares an SRC meeting where the assessment forms from the SRC members and the ER as well as the response of the applicant will be discussed. During this meeting a preliminary ranking of proposals based on the scores provided by ER and SRC members on the assessment forms will be used as the basis for the discussion. This SRC meeting aims to reach a consensus on each application and on the basis of this consensus the final ranking may differ from the preliminary ranking. The assessment forms filled in by ER and SRC members will remain confidential.

### **Selection criteria**

All proposals will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- I. Project excellence (objectives, feasibility, impact, innovation, quality and record of investigators, quality of the proposed methodology)
- II. EDCTP relevance (public health relevance for developing countries, adequacy of proposal in context of the call)
- III. Alignment with the Scientific Strategic Plan of the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise (see [www.hivvaccineenterprise.org](http://www.hivvaccineenterprise.org))
- IV. Potential impact (need for strengthening, restructuring existing research capacities, knowledge dissemination, sustainability)
- V. Compliance with national and international standards of research, Good Clinical Practice, ethics and safety related issues (in accordance with national and EU legislation, international conventions and declaration).
- VI. Implementation Plan of Capacity Building (research activities, staff and facilities development, networking activities, training activities, consortium management activities, work planning and package of each participant including deliverable list, performance indicators)
- VII. Consortium description (role of participants, achievement of objectives, involvement of private sector)
- VIII. Project Management (organisational structure, decision-making mechanisms, knowledge management, co-funding arrangements)
- IX. Clinical Trial Management (if applicable – steering committee, sponsorship, daily management for the trial)
- X. Project resources (mobilisation of resources - personnel, equipment and finances)
- XI. Gender issues (promotion of gender equality, gender action plan concerning the staff involved in the project)

### **Threshold**

All selection criteria will be assessed on a scale of five categories from 'Poor' to 'Excellent'. EDCTP has defined an overall threshold for all selection criteria of 'Good' (third in the assessment scale) to ensure that all applications meet a minimum level of quality.

Exceptions are made for the following selection criteria:

- II. EDCTP Relevance: the minimum level will be 'Very Good' (second in the assessment scale). A rejection will follow, if an application does not meet the minimum level.
- X. Gender issues: this selection criterion does not include a threshold.

### **Assessment**

The ER and SRC assess the applications against the above-mentioned selection criteria and provide judgment for each criterion by selecting the categories in the following scale:

1. Excellent



2. Very Good
3. Good
4. Weak
5. Poor

On the assessment form the reviewer is required to provide reasons for the selected category. This explanation should provide clear insight on how the reviewer has come to his/her judgment.

### **Consensus approach**

All SRC members will be sent all proposals that were submitted at least 2 weeks before the SRC meeting. During the meeting they will receive a summary of the ER assessment as well as the response of the applicant to the ER queries. Please note that the identity of ER will not be revealed to the SRC members at any time. The SRC members who reviewed the proposal will present their views during the meeting. All other SRC members will also be given the possibility to voice their opinion. To help the consensus discussion during the meeting the EDCTP secretariat will provide a preliminary ranking of the applications based on the average scores on assessment form prepared by ER and SRC members. The consensus discussion will be based on the comments made by the reviewers, the applicants' response and on any other comments that may arise during the meeting. In the event the consensus is not reached voting may be necessary. The consensus will result in a final ranking of all proposals.

The EDCTP Secretariat will prepare a consolidation report on each proposal. A standard consolidation report will contain a project summary and list the requested budget, available co-funding, the final ranking as well as comments and recommendations of the SRC and the ER.

### **Partnership Board (PB) recommendation**

The PB is responsible for preparing and maintaining the EDCTP scientific strategy. They assess whether the proposals recommended for funding by the SRC are in line with the EDCTP strategic priorities. The consolidation reports and the minutes of SRC meeting will be discussed during a PB meeting. If needed, the EDCTP secretariat clarifies the procedure that was followed. In addition the SRC Chair may be requested to act as rapporteur to clarify the consensus discussion. All participants to the PB meeting are asked to declare any conflicts of interest in compliance with EDCTP Policy on Conflict of Interest prior to the PB meeting. The outcome of the meeting is a list of applications recommended for funding to be presented to the General Assembly for a final decision.

### **General Assembly (GA) decision**

The EDCTP Secretariat presents the consolidation reports as well as the minutes of the SRC meeting and the recommendation of the Partnership Board to the General Assembly for their final decision. Again, all participants to the meeting are asked to declare any conflicts of interest in compliance with EDCTP Policy on Conflict of Interest. The GA approves the budget for the proposals to be funded by EDCTP.

After receiving the approval of the GA, the EDCTP Secretariat informs the applicants on the outcome of the selection procedure. If the proposal was selected for funding the contract negotiations will commence. Depending on the contract negotiations the proposed budget may be subjected to changes.