Det Norske Veritas
Foundation

INSTRUCTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL EXPERTS

1. Purpose and guiding principles

Independent external experts provide independent scientific peer review of research proposals submitted to Det Norske Veritas Foundation's Research Funding Initiative. The purpose of the expert peer review is to ensure a high-quality, fair, and credible assessment of scientific merit, conducted with integrity, professionalism, and consistency.

The expert review constitutes Stage 2 of the Foundation's three-stage review and decision process. Independent external experts provide an advisory scientific assessment of the proposals, which will be used by the Research Funding Committee in their final review.

The expert review process is governed by the principles of independence, impartiality, confidentiality, transparency, and scientific integrity.

2. Role and mandate of Independent External Experts

Independent external experts are appointed by the Research Funding Secretariat and shall possess appropriate and sufficient competence relevant to the themes and objectives of the call. They have the following responsibilities:

- To assess the scientific quality of eligible proposals against the published evaluation criteria.
- To provide independent scores and written assessments for each assigned proposal.
- To carry out the assessment within the defined timelines and procedures.

Proposals are assessed by independent external experts with relevant international scientific competence. To safeguard independence and avoid bias, experts are appointed to ensure impartiality. The composition of expert groups is determined by the Secretariat based on competence, independence, and conflict-of-interest considerations.

Experts act solely in a scientific advisory capacity. They do not make funding recommendations, determine rankings of the final funded portfolio, or apply strategic or budgetary considerations. Strategic and portfolio-level decisions are the responsibility of the Research Funding Committee.

3. Independence, conflicts of interest and confidentiality

Experts must be independent and free from conflicts of interest. See "Research Funding Conflict of Interest and Integrity Policy" document.

3.1 Duty to declare conflicts of interest

Before reviewing any proposal, experts are required to assess and declare whether they are conflicted (ineligible to review) or unconflicted (eligible to review). Experts are personally responsible for identifying and declaring conflicts of interest.

If an expert is uncertain whether a situation constitutes a conflict of interest, the expert must inform the Secretariat immediately and await further guidance.

3.2 Typical conflict of interest situations

An expert must not review a proposal if they, for example:

- Are involved in the proposal as applicant, collaborator, supervisor, or advisor.
- Have had recent or ongoing research collaboration with key project personnel.
- Have a close professional, institutional, financial, or personal relationship that could reasonably be perceived to affect impartiality.
- Stand to gain professionally or financially from the outcome of the review process.

If a conflict of interest exists, the expert must not participate in the review of the affected proposal.

3.3 Confidentiality and integrity

Experts are bound by strict confidentiality.

All proposal materials, personal data, assessments, scores, deliberations, and outcomes must be treated as confidential information and used solely for the purpose of the review.

Experts must:

- Access and submit assessments only through the Foundation's designated digital review system.
- Not share proposals, assessments, or information with third parties.
- Not store proposal materials beyond what is necessary for conducting the review.
- Delete any local copies of proposal documents once the assessment is completed.

Confidentiality obligations apply during and after the review process.

3.4 No contact with applicants

Experts must not contact applicants, project leaders, research teams, supervisors, or applicant organizations before, during, or after the review process.

All communication related to proposals, clarifications, or procedural questions must go exclusively through the Research Funding Secretariat.

4. Process steps for experts

The expert review process consists of the following steps:

1. Acceptance of the assignment, including compliance with confidentiality and communication requirements.
2. Declaration of conflicts of interest for each assigned proposal.
3. Independent assessment and submission of scores and written assessments.
4. Completion of the assignment within the agreed deadline.

5. Materials provided and expert deliverables

5.1 Materials

The Secretariat will provide access to:

- The relevant Call for Proposals, including scope, objectives, and evaluation criteria.
- The proposal documents submitted by applicants.
- Instructions for using the digital review system.

5.2 Deliverables

For each proposal, experts must submit:

- A score for each evaluation criteria, using the defined scoring scale.
- A written assessment explaining the main strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, clearly linked to the evaluation criteria.

Assessments must be submitted within the specified deadlines.

6 Evaluation criteria and scoring scale

Each proposal shall be assessed using four equally weighted criteria. Each criterion is scored independently on a scale from 0 to 5. Proposals shall be assessed in relation to the objectives and scope of the specific call, using the defined evaluation criteria.

6.1 Evaluation criteria

6.1.1 Excellence (Scientific quality)

Assessment of the clarity, ambition, originality, and scientific robustness of the proposed research, including its grounding in theory and prior work.

The assessment shall consider:

- The clarity, relevance and ambition of the scientific objectives and research questions.
- The degree to which the proposed research is original and advances knowledge beyond the current state of the art.
- The soundness, credibility and robustness of the scientific approach and methodology.
- The extent to which the proposed work is well-founded in relevant theory, concepts and prior research.

6.1.2 Impact (Effects and outcomes)

Assessment of the potential for the project to generate meaningful scientific, societal, or policy-related effects, consistent with the objectives of the call.

The assessment shall consider:

- The potential of the project's results to generate effects within research, society or policy, as specified by the call objectives, and the requirement for basic research as per the Frascati definition.
- The credibility and realism of the expected outcomes and their contribution to stated goals.
- The quality and appropriateness of plans for dissemination, communication and use of results.
- The added value of the project compared to existing research, initiatives or funding instruments.

In assessing impact, experts shall focus on scientifically credible and intellectually honest pathways to long-term impact, consistent with the nature of basic research. Immediate application or commercial relevance is not required.

6.1.3 Implementation

Assessment of the feasibility and coherence of the project plan, including organization, resources, and risk management.

The assessment shall consider:

- The coherence, structure and feasibility of the work plan, including milestones and deliverables.
- The appropriateness of project organisation, including roles, responsibilities and competence of the project team or leadership.
- The realism and justification of the project timeline, budget and allocation of resources.
- The identification of key risks and the adequacy of proposed mitigation measures.

6.1.4 Contribution to the Foundation's purpose

Assessment of how the proposal contributes to the Foundation's purpose of protecting life, property, and the environment, through high-quality basic scientific research, and alignment with the call's priority areas.

The assessment shall consider:

- The clarity and credibility of the rationale for how the proposed research contributes to the Foundation's purpose of protecting life, property, and the environment.
- The extent to which the proposal advances high-quality basic scientific research within the priority areas defined in the call.

Ethical considerations and research integrity are expected to be addressed within the relevant criteria where applicable.

6.2 Scoring scale

0 - The proposal fails to address the criteria or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

1 - Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed or shows serious weaknesses.

2 - Fair. The criterion is addressed at a basic level but with significant weaknesses.

3 - Good. The criterion is well addressed, but with notable shortcomings.

4 - Very good. The criterion is addressed very well, with only minor shortcomings.

5 - Excellent. The proposal fully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion; any shortcomings are negligible.

Experts must apply the scale consistently and avoid introducing additional or implicit criteria.

7 Written assessment standards

Written assessments must be professional, constructive, and evidence-based.

Assessments should:

- Clearly justify the given scores.
- Identify both strengths and weaknesses.
- Be based solely on the information provided in the proposal.
- Avoid personal, speculative, or comparative statements.

Experts are expected to apply the evaluation criteria in a manner that is fair, unbiased, and attentive to diversity in scientific perspectives, disciplines, institutions, and approaches.

Experts must not include funding recommendations, strategic portfolio considerations, or budget prioritization in their assessments.

Experts are not expected to reach consensus with other reviewers. Divergent scientific assessments are a normal and accepted part of the review process and will be managed by the Secretariat and the Research Funding Committee at later stages.

8 Scientific integrity and ethical concerns

If an expert identifies potential concerns related to scientific integrity, ethics, plagiarism, data validity, or reputational risk, the issue must be flagged confidentially to the Secretariat with a clear explanation of the concern.

Experts should not attempt to investigate or resolve such concerns directly.

9 Use of artificial intelligence tools

Experts may use digital tools, including artificial intelligence (AI) tools, solely for language refinement of their own written assessments. AI tools may be used only for language polishing of own text and editorial improvement, and must not be used to analyse proposals, generate scientific assessments or support scores or judgement.

Proposal text, personal data, or confidential information must not be uploaded to public or external AI services. Scientific judgement, scores, and assessments must be performed by the expert personally.

10 Transparency of reviews and personal data

Applicants will receive the experts' written assessments and scores as part of the feedback process. Reviewer identities will not be disclosed to applicants.

The Foundation may, in accordance with applicable data protection legislation (GDPR), disclose aggregated information about the use of independent experts for transparency purposes after the completion of a call.

Any such disclosure will not link individual experts to specific proposals or assessments. Personal data will be processed, stored, and retained in accordance with applicable data protection regulations.

11 Time, workload, delivery deadline & remuneration

Independent external experts are expected to complete their assessments within the agreed timelines and in accordance with the scope of the assignment.

As a general guideline:

- Each expert may be assigned up to 20 proposals, any assignment beyond 20 proposals shall require your prior written consent.
- The expected time allocation is approximately 1.5 hours per proposal.
- The assessment shall normally be completed within one (1) month from the date of assignment.

The Secretariat may adjust the number of proposals and timelines based on the scope and complexity of the call and the availability of experts.

Experts shall receive standardized remuneration for their work, determined by the Foundation. The level of remuneration reflects the expected workload and is communicated upon appointment.

12 Support and contact

All procedural, technical, or timeline-related questions must be directed to the Research Funding Secretariat. The Secretariat administers and supports the review process but does not influence scientific judgement.

This instruction document is binding for all independent external experts engaged by Det Norske Veritas Foundation under the Research Funding Initiative.