



Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

Creative Europe: Culture

CREATIVE EUROPE

GUIDE FOR EXPERTS

ON

QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVE EUROPE

'CULTURE SUB-PROGRAMME'

managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

OCTOBER 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (hereafter the 'Agency') is responsible for the implementation of the Creative Europe Programme¹ under the supervision of the European Commission. This means that the Agency is in charge of the selection of projects to be funded under the Culture Sub-programme.

The Agency appoints an Evaluation Committee for each call for proposals, whose role it is to carry out the evaluation process of all proposals submitted and to propose a list of potential beneficiaries to the authorising officer in view of taking the financing decision on the award of grants based on the quality assessments. The Evaluation Committee is composed of representatives of the Executive Agency and the European Commission. Experts are not part of this committee.

The Evaluation Committee runs these selections with the assistance of independent external experts. The experts hired by the Agency have an advisory role; the final recommendation on the selection or rejection of applications remains with the Evaluation Committee. The aim of the expert evaluation is to ensure that each application receives an objective assessment from an external person with expertise in the field covered by the action, and that this individual assessment is also subject to a review with another external person (or eventually a third one) who has assessed the same application. The aim is to ensure that only proposals² of the highest quality are selected for funding. Experts support the process through evaluating application, drafting feedback provided to applicants.

In order to guarantee transparency, equal treatment and impartial decisions, the assessment process is based on a peer review system further described in the coming sections of this document.

This guide is a tool for experts, providing instructions and guidance in order to ensure a standardised and high quality assessment of applications.

2. ROLE AND APPOINTMENT OF EXPERTS

2.1 Role of experts

The role of independent experts is to **advise the Evaluation Committee on the quality** of project proposals in relation to the policy objectives of the Creative Europe Culture Sub-programme and the priorities for the concerned scheme.

The quality assessment is an essential part of the selection procedure. The feedback on applications sent to applicants at the end of the selection also builds on these assessments (*see section 4 Feedback to applicants*).

Experts are **recruited** through an open call for expression of interest³. Experts are appointed on the basis of their skills and expertise in the cultural and creative sector in which they are asked

¹ The Creative Europe Programme was established by the Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the 'Creative Europe Programme (2014 to 2020)', and its corrigenda of 27 June 2014 (OJ L 189/260) and 18 April 2018 (OJ L 103).

² Please note that the terms 'proposal' and 'application' are used interchangeably in this Guide.

³ The list resulting from this call for expression of interest is valid for the duration of the current generation of programmes managed by the Agency, i.e. until 31.12.2020 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/working-expert/call-for-expressions-interest-n%C2%B0-eacea201301_en

to assess applications. However, other criteria like language competencies, gender balance, the coverage of nationalities and geographical balance will also be taken into account in the final composition of an expert pool. Experts may be asked to assess a number of interdisciplinary proposals.

For the assessment of project applications, the Agency applies a system of rotation of experts. This rotation makes it mandatory to include in the pool of experts at least 25% 'new experts' (i.e. experts not having worked for Creative Europe during more than 3 consecutive years), and 10% 'brand new' experts (i.e. experts who have never worked before for Creative Europe).

The management of expert contracts is based on a fully electronic workflow.

The Agency does not disclose information or contact details on experts in relation with a given proposal they assess. The Agency however publishes each year on its website a list with the details on experts who have concluded a contract of more than 15.000€ per year.

Experts perform evaluations on a personal basis, not as representatives of their country, their employer or any other entity.

2.2 Code of conduct and conflict of interest

Experts must perform their task with impartiality, objectivity and equal treatment to all applicants, to the highest professional standards and within the deadline agreed with the Agency. They are further bound to a code of conduct as set out in the call for expression of interest and contract with the Agency. In that respect, expert's attention is drawn to the following aspects:

Conflict of interest

- Experts must not have a conflict of interest⁴ **at the time of their appointment and sign a declaration** that no such conflict exists.
- They also inform the Executive Agency should such a conflict arise **in any of the applications** submitted and especially in any of the ones they have been allocated.

Can be considered as conflict of interest any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the experts' work is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest.

When a potential conflict of interest is reported by the expert or brought to the attention of the Agency by any means, the Evaluation Committee will analyse the circumstances and any objective elements of information at its disposal. If the Evaluation Committee comes to the conclusion that there is conflict of interest, the expert is either excluded from the assessment of that particular application, or from the entire selection round.

The Agency will undertake its own checks to verify that there is no conflict of interest by any of the expert involved in the selection. In case of breach of the declaration obligations, the Agency may terminate the contract.

Confidentiality

⁴ Financial Regulation Art. 57(2): « ... a conflict of interests exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person, ..., is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other shared interest with a recipient.» <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:298:0001:0096:EN:PDF>

Experts are bound by confidentiality, as all information relating to the assessment process is strictly confidential. They are not allowed to disclose any information about the applications submitted and results of the assessment and selection to anyone either during or after the selection. During the assessment process, experts are also bound to respect the data protection of individuals as stipulated in the applicable Regulation⁵ to which the EU institutions and bodies are bound.

2.3 Conditions of remuneration and reimbursement

Experts will be informed about their precise workload and payment conditions, including reimbursement of travel and subsistence cost (if applicable), at the time of engagement. These conditions are clearly stated in the contract signed with the Agency.

3. ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS

The assessment procedure generally consists on the following main steps described in more detail below:

- **Briefing of experts;**
- **Individual assessments**
- **Consolidated assessments** including quality review and editing of final comments;
- **Final panel & establishment of a ranked list of grant application proposed for funding;**
- **Feedback to applicants** including editing of final comments

3.1 The assessment process

3.1.1. Expert briefing

In order to ensure high quality of evaluations, the Agency makes certain that experts receive all necessary information and training before they start working. Therefore they generally participate in one or several briefing sessions in order to:

- ensure that **all information** on the content of the call, the technicalities (tools) and the process (selection timetable) has been **read** by the experts and thoroughly **understood**.
- make sure experts are familiar with the **structure and content of the application form** and tools to be used;
- foster **common understanding** of the award criteria, priorities and objectives of the call for proposal through group discussions;
- **train and guide experts** on how to conduct their evaluations in compliance with the award criteria set out in the call and on what is expected in terms of comments so that all assessments are carried out in a coherent and consistent way;
- ensure that all experts adhere to the **principles of confidentiality, impartiality and absence of conflict of interest** in the frame of the evaluation exercise

⁵ Regulation 45/2001 of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data, O.J. 12 January 2001 L8/1, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/tools/disclaimer/documents/l_00820010112en00010022.pdf

General principles of expert briefings

- All information needed to carry out the evaluations is made available in advance before the briefings preferably through an Online Expert Community
- Transparency: experts must be provided with the same information as applicants and carry out their assessments on that basis.
- Experienced experts may take the lead role as facilitators to stimulate and frame discussions during the briefing sessions or on the forums in the Online Expert Community.

The briefing sessions are essentially interactive and emphasis is put on practical exercises (i.e. exercise on anonymised mock application). This allows experts to exchange points of view, get answers to their questions and clarify any doubts related to the selection process and methodology.

Location of the briefing sessions

The briefings take place either in Brussels in the premises of the Agency, or are organised online, or follow a mixed approach (partly onsite / partly online meetings).

Over the past years the Agency has moved more and more towards online briefing sessions as this approach enables flexibility.

3.1.2 Individual assessments

Proposals are evaluated by two experts. Each expert first works individually and independently, gives scores and comments for each award criterion, summarises his assessment in the assessment form and submits it electronically⁶.

3.1.3 Consolidated assessments

Once both individual assessments have been finalised and submitted electronically, the Agency puts both experts in contact to consolidate their views on the proposal and produce single agreed scores and comments on each of the award criteria⁷ and draft an overall summary of their evaluation.

Each expert is nominated as Expert 1 or Expert 2 for an application. Expert 1 is in charge of drawing up the draft consolidated assessment in terms of scores and comments, based on the two already completed individual assessments and on the discussion with Expert 2. After agreement with Expert 2, he submits the consolidated assessment electronically in the system.

If the difference between the total score of both individual assessments is more than 30 points and one of the two experts scored 75 points or more, an additional third assessment of the application is automatically generated. This would also be the case if two experts are unable to reach consensus, or to agree on consolidated scores and comments for an application. A third individual assessment might as well be triggered at the request of the Evaluation Committee on a case-by-case basis.

When a third assessment is triggered, the experts with the two assessments that are closest in terms of their overall score will undertake the consolidation, in this case the text of the most extreme assessment in terms of overall score must be taken into account by the two consolidators.

⁶ Only full points can be used.

⁷ Only full points can be used.

3.1.4 Experts' panel

Once the consolidation phase is complete, a group of experts (called 'quality experts') may meet, online or onsite in Brussels, to review projects which evaluation raised specific concerns and for which the Evaluation Committee needs further advice.

3.2 Assessment of award criteria and scoring

Experts assess applications against the award criteria defined in the Guidelines related to each scheme.

The award criteria for 'Support for European cooperation projects' (both for category 1 smaller scale and for category 2 larger scale) are:

- 1. Relevance;
- 2. Quality of the content and activities;
- 3. Communication and dissemination;
- 4. Quality of the partnership

Each of the award criteria is defined through several elements (sub-questions) which must be taken into account by experts when analysing an application. These elements form an exhaustive list of points to be considered before scoring the criterion. They are intended to guide experts through the evaluation of the criterion in question but they must not be scored individually.

When assessing applications against award criteria, experts make a judgement on the extent to which these applications meet the defined criteria. This judgement must be based on information provided by the applicant only. Experts must not assume information that is not stated explicitly or search the internet. Information relevant to a specific award criterion may appear in different parts of the application. Experts take all of it into consideration.

An application can receive a maximum total of 100 points. The number of points to be attributed per award criterion is indicated in Section 9 – AWARD CRITERIA of the 'Guidelines'.

To be considered for funding, proposals must score a minimum quality threshold of 75/100 points (applicable to both categories of projects).

The table below shows the relative points of each criterion for 'support for European cooperation projects':

<u>Award criteria</u>	Maximum points for 'Support for European cooperation projects' (category 1 and 2) are:
<u>Relevance</u>	30

<u>Quality of the content and activities</u>	30
<u>Communication and dissemination</u>	20
<u>Quality of the partnership</u>	20
<u>TOTAL</u>	100

Experts assess the application on the basis of the given award criteria and score each criterion with maxima as set above.

In order to ensure quality standards and coherence in approach, six ranges of scores and quality levels for applications have been defined.

The table below shows the ranges of scores for the individual **quality standards** depending on the maximum score of the award criterion.

	30 points	20 points
Excellent	30-28	20-18
Very good	27-24	17-15
Good	23-19	14-12
Fair	18-13	11-9
Weak	12-6	8-5
Very weak	5-0	4-0

Ranges of scores correspond to the following standards:

- **Excellent** – the application fully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question convincingly and successfully. It provides all the information and evidence needed and there are no concerns or areas of weakness.
- **Very good** – the application addresses in detail all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. It provides all the information and evidence needed and there are only minor concerns or areas of weakness.
- **Good** – the application addresses the criterion well, although few improvements could be made. It gives clear information on nearly all of the evidence needed.
- **Fair** – the application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are some weaknesses. It gives some relevant information, but there are several areas where detail is lacking or the information is unclear.
- **Weak** - the application fails to properly address the criterion and there are many weaknesses. It does not give enough relevant information or gives very little relevant information.
- **Very weak** – the application fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.

Experts must provide comments on each award criterion and, in their comments, refer explicitly to the elements of analysis under the relevant criterion. The comments on each award criterion have to reflect and justify the score given for it. They should emphasize the proposal's strengths and weaknesses.

Experts must assess all applications in full, regardless of the score given to any award criterion.

3.3 Assessment tool

Experts carry out their assessment online using the Online Expert Evaluation Tool (OEET). The applications to be assessed are accessible through the OEET. Experts are provided with technical instructions for the use of OEET as part of their briefing.

Experts examine the issues to be considered under each award criterion, enter their scores for each award criterion and provide comments.

Once the individual assessment is complete, experts validate it in the OEET and confirm that they have no conflict of interest with respect to that particular application.

3.4 Funding threshold

The number of applications that can be funded is dependent on the budget available for an action as stipulated in the [annual work programme of the Commission](#)⁸.

To be considered for funding, proposals must score a minimum quality threshold of 75/100 points (applicable to both categories of European cooperation projects).

Applications are ranked in order of merit by the Evaluation Committee and considered for funding until the budget runs out. If enough applications of sufficient quality are available, the Evaluation Committee can propose a **reserve list** of applications. These could be considered for funding in the event that:

- ✓ one or several applications on the main list can no longer be funded;
- ✓ additional budget becomes available.

3.5 Quality assurance

The Agency aims at the highest level of quality at every stage of the evaluation process. Therefore particular emphasis is put on:

Training of experts & communication: the Agency sets up interactive and flexible briefing sessions to make sure that all aspects of the assessment procedure are clearly understood by experts before they start working. Where possible, an Online Expert Community allows on-going dialogue and exchange on thematic, methodological and technical issues among peers and with Agency staff (see section 3.1).

Quality review: The Evaluation Committee closely monitors the quality of expert's assessments and can require the expert to revise the assessment if it fails to meet the quality standards. The Agency may call upon experienced experts, commonly referred to as quality / lead experts, to

⁸ The annual Work programme is available on the Internet page of DG Education & Culture http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/awp/index_en.htm

assist the team in carrying out quality review of individual and/or consolidated assessments. The aim is to ensure:

- ✓ formal correctness;
- ✓ appropriateness, clarity and completeness of comments;
- ✓ coherence between scores and comments.

Agency staff or lead experts will not, however, influence the opinion of the independent experts.

Quality control: The work of experts will be monitored according to a set of quality standards mentioned here below:

- the application has been assessed according to the award criteria defined in the Guidelines solely and the evaluation only address those;
- coherence between the scores provided to each award criteria and the respective comments;
- the comments provide clear and sustained strong and weak points under each award criteria;
- the comments are expressed in clear, neutral and respectful language;
- the comments provided are of appropriate indicative length;
- The work has been performed according to the pre-defined calendar and deadlines.

4. Feedback to applicants

The Agency notifies the applicant in writing of the result of their application. Each applicant receives detailed feedback on scores and comments. This feedback is based on the consolidated final assessment and is given in English.

Reference documents

- Guidelines documents for the call 'Support for European Cooperation projects 2019' EACEA 34/2018: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/funding/support-european-cooperation-projects-2019_en
- Legal basis Creative Europe Programme:
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013R1295>
- Creative Europe Culture - European Commission DG EAC website:
http://ec.europa.eu/culture/index_en.htm

Award criteria – Call EACEA 34/2018

'Support for European Cooperation projects 2019'

Category 1 smaller scale cooperation projects and Category 2 larger scale cooperation projects

Award Criteria	Score
1. Relevance	0 to 30
Sub-questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- How relevant is the project's strategy to implement one or more of the priorities considered as instrumental to the achievement of the objectives of the Sub-programme?- How convincing, clearly defined and coherent are the strategies proposed to achieve the above priority(ies) that the project seeks to implement?- If applicable, what is innovative in the project compared with the state of the arts (innovative approach to creation, audience, business models, etc)?- What is the European added value of the project? To what extent is the project complementary to other cultural actions implemented at national, regional or local level?- What is the expected short/medium/long term impact of the project?- What strategy is proposed to ensure sustainability beyond the project's duration?- If applicable, how will the project foster the work of artists and cultural operators, their creation, productions, their mobility, training and employment?	

Award Criteria	Score
2. Quality of the content and activities	0 to 30
Sub-questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– How concrete, well defined and coherent are the activities with the objectives and strategies of the project?– What are the needs of the presented target groups and how clearly do they relate to the objectives and activities of the project?– What is the methodology of implementation of the activities and how relevant are they?– Are there concrete and well defined results (outcomes) and the deliverables (output) of the project? How appropriate are they towards the overall objectives of the project?– Is a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the expected results (outcome) foreseen and how clear and appropriate is it?– How appropriate is the allocation of the budget and human resources to the activities undertaken in the framework of the project?– How clear and realistic is the time-table for implementing the project activities?	

Award Criteria	Score
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3. Communication and dissemination	0 to 20
Sub-questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How clear and appropriate is the strategy of external communication of the project including the objectives, target groups, tools, channels, media, impact and timeline? – How can the communication strategy of the project contribute to the visibility of the European Union and its values? – How relevant and appropriate is the dissemination strategy put in place by the partnership? – How will the dissemination strategy provide information of the results of the project to the sector and cross border? What is the impact of the dissemination strategy in terms of scope (at local, regional, national and European levels) and extent (beyond the end of the project)? 	

Award Criteria	Score
4. Quality of the partnership	0 to 20
Sub-questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How is the partnership organized and explained? Is its structure relevant to the project? – How will the cooperation ensure the effective implementation of the activities and project's objectives? To what extent does it ensure a strong involvement of all partners corresponding to their capacities and specific area of expertise, and a clear division of tasks between them? – How beneficial is the inclusion of partners from a diverse geographical background for this partnership, the project and its objectives? – Only for projects involving partnership with organisation(s) established in those countries referred to under points 2 and 5 of section 6.1.1 of these guidelines: – To what extent does the partnership with operators from outside the EU reflect the concept of the role of culture in the EU's external relations, as spelled out in the New European Agenda for Culture? 	